Epiphanies from the Mind Garden

A Metaphoric Journey into Love

Ian Christopher Macfrey

© Ian Christopher Macfrey (Ian Macfarlane) 2007–2026

Contents

Preface: A Journey of Miles and Years 8

I. "Every step is on the path…" 9

II. Sudden calamity and a subsequent quest: ushering a parade of epiphanies onto the written page… 30

Introduction: In Pursuit of Eden 35

I. "There is nothing new under the sun…" 36

II. Grandma and the primordial paradise… 38

Part I

— Unearthing the roots of insight and bringing them to light —

Chapter 1: Discovering the Garden 43

I. A garden of thought is in everything, existing everywhere, enduring evermore… 44

II. Observing a multitude of opposing forces within and around us… 66

III. Understanding the nature of our own dichotomies… 80

Chapter 2: Through a Timeless Threshold 83

I. The first epiphany into mind gardening… 84

II. An antidote for living among weeds… 97

III. Voices and whispers from our truer nature… 114

IV. Braving beyond crisis… 122

V. Choices between miracles and mortal mistakes… 143

VI. Practicing perfection and other exceptional conclusions… 158

Chapter 3: An Unholy Trinity of Weeds 164

I. "In the name of time, distance, and space, Amen…" 165

II. Rudimentary leaps out of temporal and spatial reality… 170

III. Surmounting the delusions of day-to-day existence… 179

IV. The grace forever enfolding us… 189

Chapter 4: Practice, Practice, Practice 204

I. Mastering practice and practicing mastery… 205

II. The two fundamental features of practice… 215

III. Learning by imitation: monkey see, monkey do… 220

IV. Schooldays for Alexander-the-Dog… 228

V. Additional adventures on four legs… 252

VI. Chasing chipmunks, lessons in math, and communing with angels… 273

VII. A destination with no bounds… 285

VIII. Meaningful interludes with birds and a beast… 293

IX. A curious proposal… 317

X. Attaining canine consciousness… 320

XI. Practiced leaps in learning… 332

XII. Beyond all training of our unique and separate selves… 359

XIII. Exercising true compassion or begetting more dualities… 361

Chapter 5: The Conscious Gardener 363

I. An anatomical portrait of gardens and gardening… 364

II. Overcoming tone deafness with tonal control… 369

III. A bogus bus stop, quieting dementia patients, and monkeys who wash sweet potatoes… 386

IV. How outgrowth from thought materializes… 394

V. Carts before horses… 413

VI. And faith before the fact… 418

VII. Tools, tasks, and techniques for the conscious gardener… 431

VIII. Making miracles manifest… 445

IX. While seedlings sprout and blossoms bloom… 476

X. Shielding our dreams as newly planted seeds and guiding them to fruition… 482

XI. Mindfully sowing seeds of mindfulness… 487

Part II

— Converting the weeds of duality into divine love —

Chapter 6: To Discern and Expose Maya's Veil 493

I. A cosmic seesaw versus the tree of good and evil… 494

II. "Seesawing" the sins of parents upon their children… 496

III. The proliferation of duplicitous weeds from all ages past to the present moment… 500

IV. An omnipresent weediness as our current state of affairs… 509

V. Ensnared in semantic silliness: who's right, who's wrong, and whose finger is pointing at the moon… 518

Chapter 7: Awareness Unfolding… 547

I. A process of transfigurations… 548

II. How to distinguish wheat from chaff… 550

III. Utilizing or neglecting our five physical senses, the entire body, and all perceptions operating beyond such finite parameters… 551

IV. An audible mystery: blurring and merging "times" and "spaces"… 559

V. Defeating nightmares, altering outcomes through lucid dreaming, and blessing souls trapped in a realm of shadows… 566

VI. Thought-induced revisions to reality… 579

VII. Developing senses beyond sight and sound for those who are blind or deaf… 583

VIII. An amazing display of mind over matter… 588

IX. Curative quests ending night blindness… 592

X. Choosing to rehearse or neglect our ever-evolving sensorial abilities… 604

XI. The discovery and use of heightened perceptions as they emerge from both seemingly physical and nonphysical roots… 615

XII. Sharpening senses, expanding sentience, and shifting dualistic tendencies into a genuine wellspring of empathy and love… 630

XIII. Even more dichotomies to root out and dissolve… 640

XIV. Generating goosebumps… 650

XV. Shifting good luck, beginner's luck, and lucky streaks into enduring displays of blessedness… 657

XVI. A simple method for transmuting weeds into wonders… 667

XVII. Consciously seeding the soil… 670

XVIII. Effecting "three sisters"… 679

XIX. Where inspiration and aspiration may lead… 682

Chapter 8: Flowers of Love… 684

I. An ultimate yearning… 685

II. The mind gardener's directive… 698

III. Opting not to suffer… 702

IV. When "hallucinations" heal… 713

V. A flight of love to the rescue… 742

Chapter 9: Waking the Eden Within… 748

I. "Faith, hope, and love abide; and the greatest of these is love…" 749

II. The essential attribute of patience… 752

III. "There is a place in the soul that neither time nor space, nor created thing can touch…" 753

IV. "There are two ways to live your life: one is as though nothing is a miracle, and the other is as if everything is…" 761

Afterword: A Final Consideration 765

I. Online surprises… 766

II. Rebooting the mind garden manuscript… 769

III. To write and teach within the wilds… 774

IV. A metaphor evolving… 779

Acknowledgements: Dedicated to All 787

- Preface -

A Journey of Miles and Years

I.

"Every step is on the path..."[1]

An unfathomable number of footsteps have accompanied each of us to this particular place and to this very moment. Such imprints are left behind whether or not we ever become aware of their presence. Regardless of how we perceive our life's passage to be—one driven by true purpose, or instead fraught with aimlessness and governed seemingly by chance—countless footprints are the irrefutable evidence of all choices leading us to wherever we find ourselves currently.

When delving into the dust of time and space, we invariably expose tremendous distances that our own treads have traversed. Each rediscovered track echoes memories derived from perpetual thought—possibly the sole source of every decision, every movement, and even every breath founded within this corporeal journey. While unearthing many such remnants from the past, I have repeatedly observed countless indications that we are occupants in an ultimate *garden of mind*, where endless thoughts, ideas, and beliefs bring about the entirety of all existence.

Deliberating upon numerous *mind garden* depictions for more than a half-century, the indelible images that they persist in generating even now have always inspired me to explore and cultivate ever-evolving, metaphoric[2] landscapes compatible with each aspect of our lives. Consequently, these conjectures have continually enhanced my understanding of the infinite

[1] A saying sometimes attributed to Lao-tzu.

[2] Throughout this text the reader will come across certain key terms that are clarified in footnotes, even when those expressions may appear to need no explanation. However, after casually asking the meaning of said words or phrases to over two hundred adults, I discovered that a significant number of people could not define many of these terms adequately. With this in mind, I chose to reference such definitions rather than possibly limiting the understanding and enjoyment of some who wish to proceed through this work. To all others, I thank them for overlooking this negligible indulgence.

According to *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary*, a metaphor is:

> ...a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them (as in drowning in money); broadly: figurative language.

possibilities of what reality actually is. In fact, I eventually found myself persisting from day to day within nothing less than what might be considered to be a sentient allegory, inducing an unfoldment of being both conscious and fully alive. This archetypal imagery has given birth to many essential epiphanies[3] about how we manifest unrelentingly who we have been, who we are now, and who we will become in every moment hereafter.

Just before reaching my seventh birthday, I unearthed the first traces of several, comparable mind garden portrayals. Although I didn't understand their significance at the time, those original findings initiated in me a vast, internal voyage that has lasted for decades. In turn, each phase of this ongoing exploration has inspired my pen ultimately to give birth now to every word taking form upon these pages.

At the time, our family of five was living in a tiny apartment built by my father. Using his own materials and labor, he totally reconstructed a small and dilapidated portion of an old barn. It was situated in the back corner of a country estate where he had been hired as caretaker.

These living quarters really were much too small a place in which all of us could reside together. However, my parents initially lived there by themselves after having been recently married. But before the renovation was started, they did ask permission for more rooms to be included in the project. After all, they were planning to have children soon, and it certainly would have been helpful to start off with a larger space in which to accommodate a growing family.

Despite my parents' pleas, the landlord insisted that our apartment be built using only the area he decided upon originally, even though these improvements would be made at no cost to him. He pressed forward with this assertion regardless of the fact that he never had plans to make use of the building for anything else whatsoever. Consequently, the rest of the structure remained unchanged for as long as we lived there. Even after our inadequately sized home was completed, he rarely stepped foot inside any part of the building; and each infrequent appearance was made only to serve a single purpose. He wished to speak with my father about

---

[3] Also, according to *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary*:

> the non-liturgical definitions of *epiphany* are as follows: "a usually sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something; an intuitive grasp of reality through something (as an event) usually simple and striking; an illuminating discovery, realization or disclosure; a revealing scene or moment; or an appearance or manifestation especially of a divine being.

Each of these aptly illustrates a portion of the multifarious meanings of this book's title and the many relevant illustrations found within the forthcoming chapters.

new tasks that he wanted him to begin immediately.

The refurbished portion of the barn consisted of what once was two tack rooms where stable gear for horses had been stored. But after its transformation into habitable quarters, there now were six partitioned areas. The largest of these became a sitting room that also contained a constricted sleeping space for my parents. Their bed was squeezed behind our *living-room* sofa, a modest couch accompanied by two end tables. Additionally, one recliner, a tiny black-and-white television, and one of the most compact spinet pianos that I had ever seen filled up much of the remainder of the room. Between two insufficient closets lay a cubicle, barely large enough to keep my mother's desk. This is where she took care of the paperwork for my dad's little landscaping business.

A munchkin-sized kitchen accessed a back entrance to the entire place. However, the room was so narrow that if the oven door were opened, no one could walk past it. An equally confining space was used for eating around an inadequately-sized breakfast table. This *dinette* had a similar logistical problem. When everybody was seated, one of the chairs completely blocked all movements between adjoining rooms.

My brother and I slept in what should have been designated as a walk-in closet. There was only room enough for our junior bunk bed, a very small dresser, and my brother's little *play* desk. A compact ladder descended from my upper berth, nearly landing at the base of an enormous steam radiator. In order not to scorch my legs when I was climbing in and out of bed, I had to be always conscious of the close proximity of that bulky, metallic intruder. Otherwise, I summarily would be burned—something that did happen from time to time.

Harry Potter probably would have felt quite at home there. After all, he was portrayed as having his first bedroom in a small closet beneath the flight of steps in his uncle's house, or as British author J. K. Rowling described it:

> ...the cupboard under the stairs.[4]

Actually, our little bedroom also had an ultra-tiny *cupboard* under a stairway to the attic, but this peculiar closet was so small that not even the slightest of furniture would fit in there. The winding set of steps overhead were not included as part of our apartment. They began in a wide-open section of the barn and rose to the two large storage rooms above.

[4] J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* adventure stories are about a young wizard-protégé and his ongoing escapades at an elite boarding school for magic.

Once my sister had been born, the only place left where her crib would fit was what some might refer to as a hallway. There were four doors leading into this brief passage, and the main entrance to our apartment had to be sealed permanently so that she could sleep in front of it. Additionally, her compact chest of drawers was stuffed into a corner between the doorway leading to our eating area and an entry to the only reasonably-sized space in the house. Oddly enough, it was the bathroom. I might add that our large, antique bathtub happened to be the only spot in these rooms where I didn't feel totally claustrophobic.

It is undeniable that my family could have benefited greatly from having a larger suite of rooms to live in. However, if the landlord had actually allowed my father to expand the apartment any further, an extraordinary collection of books stashed away for decades possibly could have been moved somewhere else or discarded completely. In either case, those manuscripts never would have been there when I was old enough to be interested in exploring them. Consequently, the life-changing ideas remaining dormant within their pages for countless years may have never been present to awaken a vital part of me.

Adjoining our compact quarters remained a large, wide-open portion of the barn. This was the room where the stairs to the attic began. My father used this space to garage his pickup truck and an old, 1950 Willeys Jeep. There were snowplows, generators, fertilizers, and various grass seeds. There were also numerous bins, barrels, and sacks of highly toxic chemicals that were used as pesticides and herbicides. Additionally, several massive gang-mowers were kept alongside a sizable assortment of other construction and gardening tools and an impressive array of landscaping equipment.

But long before my parents ever arrived on the scene, possibly a half-dozen, oddly-assembled bookshelves had been already mounted onto the back, two-story wall of that vaulted, central area. The bottommost shelf was located more than ten feet above the ground, and all others climbed upward from there. None of those hefty planks were hung completely parallel to one another. They all slanted slightly at different angles and in different directions. While one would slope upward to the right, another happened to tilt over to the left. Each shelf had a different length, none of their shelf-ends were lined-up with any others, and the entire stack ascended the wall in somewhat of a helter-skelter fashion.

As a child, I always imagined that this inaccessible *library* must have been built for some mysterious giants who remained invisible to us while we lived there. Regardless of why they had been constructed in such a bizarre fashion, these shelves housed hundreds of books

nevertheless; and each one was a hardcover copy. These long-overlooked prizes were either totally forgotten or unwanted by our landlord, because he never once set eyes upon them. The only other things that he hoarded in the barn were countless stacks of discolored and crumbling navy-surplus toilet paper rolls (probably collected while he was a rear admiral in the US Navy),[5] an empty wooden chest, and a few other useless objects that were scattered all around the attic.

Perhaps the reason for his neglecting such a fascinating archive of antiquated texts was that he had a much vaster collection inhabiting the grand, country manor house at the other end of his estate. The living room, library, most of his numerous bedrooms, and the central, second-floor hallway all had custom-designed book cases that were built right into the walls. Many of them climbed from the floor to a very lofty ceiling. Behind endless glass windows were displayed thousands of titles, hundreds that had been autographed by their authors.

Once every year, while the landlord and his wife were traveling, my mother was assigned to the monumental task of removing each book from its shelf. In turn, all of the emptied compartments had to be washed thoroughly, dried, and occasionally repainted; and the glass windows then were restored to their original, spotless condition. Finally, one by one each title was dusted, some of them were actually polished, and then they were all carefully returned to their designated places in those countless cabinets inhabiting the mansion.

Whenever she had stacked hundreds of those books outside of their enclosures, I oftentimes would sit on the carpet in that upstairs hall and go through dozens of them. To this day, the most singular series of books that I remember reading there was a complete set of the fourteen enthralling *Oz* adventures by L. Frank Baum.[6] Each volume had been uniquely illustrated and specially bound.

I specifically recall being captivated by the handwritten messages found at the beginning of those exquisite first editions. They apparently had been addressed to some of our landlord's children and signed by the author himself. At the time, I fantasized that perhaps a great writer would one day autograph an equally wonderful book especially for me.

In stark contrast to his massive library residing in the manor house, those seemingly forgotten gems in our barn were utterly forsaken. Dust and grime piled high upon each volume,

[5] No pun intended. He actually was a rear admiral!

[6] The most well-known story in this series undeniably is *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. The tale begins as a Midwestern girl is swept away by a tornado and finds herself in a mythical land called Oz.

and the musty scent of mildew flew out at anyone who dared to turn a single page within even the least-soiled selections. Actually, I was the only one who had shown enough interest to eagerly plow through every last one of those disintegrating, disremembered treasures. Many of the smaller copies were buried almost completely in a thick grunge and literally had to be dug out in order to be examined.

However, while we continued living in the barn, my brother, sister, and I were instructed never to use any of my dad's equipment to climb among those precariously-hung bookshelves. Our parents insisted that such an escapade would be much too dangerous. Eventually, all of their warnings proved to be pointless nonetheless. After all, those mystifying blocks of cloth and paper incessantly called out to me from overhead.

For a few years I withstood countless, unrelenting enticements. But, in the end, I had no choice but to obey the constant beckoning and disregard my parents' pleas. So on one late summer's afternoon when nobody else was at home, I ascended to greet those antediluvian writings that had silently awaited my arrival. Perhaps they had been doing so even since my birth. Eventually, I discovered that many of them indeed were considerably older than I ever imagined, and they also proved to be quite rare.

Within their ranks was an exceptionally timeworn, meticulously bound text. It had been written by hand in an incomparable, calligraphic script. I especially recall the gigantic hardcover copy of an English genealogical account dating back to about 1660. There were also several beautifully illustrated tales written in French—all of them printed and published in the early 1700s.

But the most intriguing volumes for me were several elaborately illustrated copies of Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist verse translated in the mid-nineteenth century from the original Mandarin. It was amid their extraordinary pages that I first discovered a world of ideas that eventually would influence all of my convictions. In fact, while delving between these feeble, dilapidated leaves of seemingly otherworldly thought, I began a journey of a lifetime. Such an irresistible quest has led me eventually to compile the innumerable discourses contained within this book.

Before my family moved out of the barn, I created a notepad in which dozens of these ageless Chinese poems were written down painstakingly by hand. To accompany them, I made a few primitive etchings of some of the illustrations that were found amid those texts.

After having entered high school a few years later, the words in my little notebook urged

me to explore continuously the writings from the Far East. During this period, I discovered many poems that utilized an unpretentious garden metaphor to portray the human mind and our mortal existence in general. This curious notion was referred to in several different ways and was described in richly expressive and diverse poetical language.

Sad to say, there is only one of those verbal illustrations that I can still remember presently. Although I am not certain if I have retained it word-for-word, it nevertheless is an incredibly beautiful and descriptive phrase—one which is worth mentioning here:

> ...a garden pathway slipping through the infinite petals of eternal thought.

But among all of those evocative ideas only a specific, single name has stood out for me above all others. It seemed to amplify the poignant and beautiful images that it certainly intended to encapsulate. Although no longer remembering precisely where I first happened upon the expression—and whether or not I might have come across it while we stilled lived in the barn apartment—I definitely remember reading about the idea of the *inner garden* during my years in high school. After all, I had sifted through dozens of anthologies containing translations of early East Asian poetry and prose in which garden images certainly were prevalent.

There nevertheless were countless other places where I might have also come across these notions because I avidly pursued many facets of Western literature as well while still a teenager, and garden metaphors could be found in the spiritual and poetical works originating in the Middle East and likewise in Europe. Regardless, I eventually felt compelled to honor all of those deeply inspired writings from the distant past and composed the following poem immediately after graduating from high school.

Albeit this certainly was an untutored attempt at poetical expression, it still resounds with a calming voice that has carried me across the wide, oceanic landscapes of my life. By merely entitling this piece "Garden of Eden",[7] I already had begun to gravitate towards the seemingly timeless belief in Utopian perfection.

Although such a place forever seems to evade us, it continually haunts humanity—even while alluring all earthly souls from within the elusive mists and myths of history. Yet, through consciously sorting and tending to all seeds of thought buried inside of ourselves, it is

[7] In the Old Testament, the perfect garden where Adam and Eve first resided. Also, a reference to any idyllic place.

conceivable that we may uncover the gates to this paradisial sanctuary and enter an ultimate garden once again.

By cultivating our thinking in a similar manner to caring for anything we might plant in an actual garden out-of-doors, we can discover how to remake our corporeal, exterior lives and transmute them in a conscious reunification with the infinite inner realm of mind. This modest poem, preceded by its familiar title, implies that we readily have the capacity for rediscovering a primordial paradise through the task of consciously *gardening* all of our thoughts:

Look deeply into a timeless pool and tend the inner garden.
Weed out all dishonesty;
Weed so very carefully yet do not rip a truth away.
Continue every moment to be the faithful gardener.

Let all flowers prosper.
Shower them with love and grace
But do not let the wrong plants bloom;
Perfect the inner garden.

At first glance, the meanings of these words may appear obvious and uncomplicated. It nevertheless has taken me decades to realize what they actually have the potential to portend. Ideas of truth, perfection, and love give the impression of their being incredibly basic—even simplistic—in import and intent.

However, what some consider to be genuine truth is often seen by others simply as opinion, illusion, misconception, fallacy, or just plain evil. Opposing perspectives and contrasting beliefs also might be perceived as nothing more than indicators of ignorance and idiocy. Such quandaries expand further while any differing faction attempts to defend and define its viewpoints more precisely.

Considering these dilemmas, how can we decide what to weed away? What should convince us that the *wrong* plants are those that we have chosen to extract? There are so many opposing beliefs and judgments assaulting every idea, every emotion, and every intention developing within our inner garden. How can we reject certain seedlings of thought when many others of us may insist emphatically that those conceptualized sprouts are valid, true, and even sacred? Which seeds will produce the wondrous flowers deserving our nurturing and protection,

and how are we to spread and fertilize them?

I spent many years developing a comprehensive analogy likening the mind (and all that manifests from within the mind) to an actual garden. From there I formulated and illustrated both internal and external processes, and their resultant manifestations, as aspects or functions of the garden. This included the tools and techniques of the gardener as well.

Aside from those ancient Chinese texts steering me irresistibly towards my lifelong exploration of the inner garden, there were also many sacred texts and proverbial sayings from across the entire globe that constantly reminded me of my quest into a *mind garden* and the vital task of tending it. Although many of these multi-faith garden images didn't allude to any inner garden per se, their persistent references of actual gardens out-of-doors—and how they can be metaphors for our lives—persistently reminded me of the many pages of Chinese poems and prose I discovered years earlier.

Among those countless writings I recall from other religions and cultures, here are a few from the Old Testament of the Bible, otherwise known as the Hebrew Scriptures (being part of the Jewish Torah):

> The Lord will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the Lord…[8]

> The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.[9]

> For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Lord God will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.[10]

> [You are] a garden fountain, a well of living water and flowing streams from Lebanon.[11]

And here is an ever-favorite garden quote of mine from the New Testament:

---

[8] From Isaiah 51:3.

[9] Isaiah 58:11.

[10] Isaiah 61:11.

[11] Song of Solomon 4:15.

> And he [Jesus] told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil; and they sprang up quickly since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty…" [12]

Aside from countless Biblical quotes creating metaphors about actual gardens, here is one especially beautiful internal garden image found in the sacred writings of the Baha'i faith:

> Wherefore sow the seeds of wisdom and knowledge in the pure soil of the heart, and keep them hidden, til the hyacinths of divine wisdom spring from mire and clay.[13]

And in the Qur'an of Islam, the following application of one particular garden image has been used more than a hundred twenty times throughout that holy text:

> Whoever obeys God and his Chosen One will be chosen to live in gardens beneath which flows rivers, and where they will live eternally.[14]

Among the many African sayings that I have heard over the years, this is the one piece of garden wisdom that I can still call up from decades past:

> Knowledge is like a garden: if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested.[15]

Moreover, the following Chinese maxim not only is practical wisdom for gardening in general, but it can also apply to our lives when we are first discovering the veritable and vast garden that resides within each of us—forever requiring our constant attention:

> Life begins the day you start a garden.

Neither of these next two gems come from any spiritual philosophy or formal religious

---

[12] Matthew 13:3–8.

[13] From *Persian Hidden Words* by Bahá'u'lláh.

[14] Qur'an 4:13.

[15] A proverb from Guinea.

doctrine. Instead, the first one originates from the pen of George Bernard Shaw: [16]

> The best place to seek God is in a garden. You can dig for him there.

And the other is simply a few lines of anonymous verse conveying the most simplistic of synopses; yet it actually expresses what we might deem to be the mind garden in its actuality:

> Your mind is a garden,
> Your thoughts are the seeds.
> The harvest can be
> Either flowers or weeds.

As I mentioned earlier, my first interest in exploring the idea of an internal garden metaphor began when I was just about to turn seven. Aside from being inspired by those ancient Chinese poems hidden in the barn where my family was living at the time, my entire childhood experience was also ensconced in a world filled with actual, real-life gardens growing in the physical realm. Ironically, that made the idea of an inner garden something I could visualize more readily.

The estate where we lived had incredibly beautiful terraced flower gardens. My father designed and built them himself. They ascended gracefully from the grand patio at the back end of the manor house. Ornate birdbaths and fountains (though not always filled with water) adorned each of the three main tiers.

Just a couple of hundred feet from our front door was a cluster of forsythia that certainly had to be larger than many houses. It happened to act as a partition between the upper level of the terraced gardens and a large lawn above it. In previous years, this immaculately manicured area once had been the site for two clay tennis courts, but they were dismantled after all of the children grew up and left home.

A circular, two-story, flowering tower of lilacs adorned the central portion of another sizable lawn, one that gradually rose up the hill towards our apartment. This gloriously massive bouquet of deep purple, light lavender, and white blossoms easily could have housed the large, open portion of the barn within its circumference. My brother, sister, and I often played games

---

[16] According to *Wikipedia*, George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) was:

> an Irish playwright, critic, polemicist and political activist. His influence on Western theatre, culture and politics extended from the 1880s to his death and beyond. He wrote more than sixty plays…

of tag around its base. When left alone, I frequently meandered by it while singing songs emanating from my prepubescent, high-soprano voice.

There was an elegant footpath formed by towering walls of massive rhododendrons on either side. This fantastical passageway was somewhat like an obscure corridor hidden mysteriously in an enchanted palace of some magus prince. The walkway itself was fully canopied, and its blossoming, arched ceiling occasionally soared more than twenty feet above the ground. Many of the rhododendron stalks were as thick as tree trunks, and there were several types that would bloom in various shades of extraordinary pinks. Others had white, blue, purple, or even deep red petals; and there still were additional sorts with multi-colored flowers. All of them tenderly embraced this brief pathway on both sides and from high overhead.

Continuing past our barn, the white-graveled drive soon transformed into a dirt lane with grass growing down the center. Once our driveway shrunk into that *road less traveled*,[17] it became engulfed in a wide meadowland brimming with a tremendous gathering of wildflowers. More than a dozen varieties of phlox were painted upon the landscape. They portrayed a virtual garden of budding rainbows bursting onto sunlight.

Whenever the occasional windy day arrived upon this idyllic scene, countless hundreds of these flowers would dance in sweeping waves over the surface of that secluded meadow; and especially on bright and warm afternoons, it wasn't uncommon to behold countless multitudes of butterflies flittering soundlessly above this sea of burgeoning color. Yet, those wingéd marvels amplified an intense, visual beauty of the place, even more than usual. I often imagined that I had just been transported into a color-filled, magical Munchkin Country in the imaginary land of Oz. From there, I would envision myself skipping down one certain *yellow brick road* to visit the Wizard of Oz in Emerald City so very far away.[18]

---

[17] This wordplay naturally is based on a phrase from Robert Frost's poem *The Road Not Taken*. He composed it in 1915 for his poet friend, Edward Thomas. Actually, he meant it as a joke although many students and poetry lovers have taken the piece very seriously over the years, extracting from its lines profound meaning that Frost never intended. (Admittedly, I too fell into this category of enthusiastic followers!) Instead, he simply was writing about when the two of them occasionally would walk together; and whenever there was a fork in the road, Thomas never could decide which lane he wanted to follow. Then, afterwards, he always would complain about not having gone the other way. So here is the final stanza of Frost's response to his friend's indecisive nature:

> I shall be telling this with a sigh
> Somewhere ages and ages hence:
> Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
> I took the one less traveled by,
> And that has made all the difference.

[18] Such fanciful imaginings emanated from fond memories that I recalled about my family's annual viewing of the film, *The Wizard of Oz*, on TV. Every Christmastime we always huddled in front of our little black and white television set, but when

My exposure to actual gardens obviously began at our doorstep but it definitely went far beyond those several acres surrounding our apartment. My father not only was caretaker for that estate, but he also maintained the grounds for several other extensive properties. Additionally, he took care of numerous cemeteries, town parks, village greens, and historical monument sites owned by our local township of Bedford, New York. Within its borders there were the hamlets of Bedford Village, Bedford Center, and Bedford Hills; and it also contained a portion of the larger nearby town of Mount Kisco.

During the summer before I discovered those books of Chinese poetry and prose, my father began to let me assist him on some of his jobs. Although I was never allowed to handle any of the heavy equipment, he gave me a pair of hand-held grass clippers and a set of small pruning shears. My job was to clip any grass that was missed by the powered rotary mower used for most of the trimming. Nevertheless, whatever his motorized trimmer couldn't reach, it was my duty to take care of all the nooks and tight places. This included clipping around fence posts, stone walls, some garden edges, and in between the heavy and gnarly roots beneath many of the more massive trees.

Naturally, as soon as I became proficient in performing these rudimentary tasks, my dad gave me others to master. I learned how to *weed*, *hook*, *edge*, and *rake*[19] many of the

---

I finally saw the film in vivid color at my grandmother's house, the *butterfly field* just beyond our apartment suddenly became synonymous with the land of Oz and became a perfect backdrop for my own color-filled escapades *over the rainbow*.

[19] As I started learning how to discern between actual flowers and weeds, there happened to be a particularly embarrassing incident where I mistook the flowers to be weeds instead. My father had just been hired to tend the grounds of a large and greatly neglected estate nearby. The stone terraces were especially riddled with weeds, so I was appointed to begin the preliminary weeding there. Among the many circular beds was one containing two lovely clusters of large, colorful blossoms. They were encroaching upon one another's space, and it was left up to me to decide which one needed to be removed. Unfortunately, I ripped away the actual flowers because their blossoms were not as big or beautiful as those of the neighboring weeds, or so was my rationalization at the time. Needless to say, my father was not at all happy with my decision.

So, over the course of my first few years of gardening, it became essential to identify correctly what must be cultivated and what should be eliminated. This indeed is a vital skill for tending the mind garden as well. We often mistake and justify the insidious weeds of duality to be nothing other than the blossoms of divine love.

After a thorough weeding, hooking the flower beds then is accomplished with a small, hand-held tool known simply as a hook. It consists of three or four curved, metal spiked ends. The gardener must grip onto the small handle and thrust its attached prongs downward into the soil. This action breaks up and tills the hard earth for better aeration and more efficient watering. It also removes any deep roots of unwanted plants that could not be pulled out when the initial weeding by hand had been performed. Hooking is a task that normally is performed while remaining on hands and knees.

Once hooking has been completed, then an elegant and distinct demarcation (or edge) must be established between each flower bed and the surrounding lawns. An edger is an instrument used to create a beautiful boundary around each tilled area—which also makes the lawn edge much easier to trim. It is a long-handled tool with a semi-circular blade on the bottom end that is shoved forcefully into the ground by nearly jumping carefully on top of its vertical blade. Clumps of grass and sod are cut away from the border of the lawn as they are tossed inward and upward into the garden itself. A pliant, wire rake then is used to gather up all of the remaining debris; and finally, a metal-toothed rake is used to complete the entire process by *combing* through the soil, leaving each flower bed with a well-groomed, clean, and deep-textured appearance.

magnificent gardens that my father originally created himself and others that he was hired to recondition and/or maintain. So over the next couple of years, I was permitted to operate the smaller rotary mowers. But by the time I had turned eleven, my father needed me to use his enormously heavy, power-driven gang mowers as well.

After a near-fatal accident, he became permanently crippled and could no longer actively participate in his business. Consequently, I oftentimes was the only one available to do the arduous tasks that he normally would have never allowed me to do at that age.

Out of sheer necessity, he also taught me how to drive so that I could manage his large, farm-style tractor, which was used to drag several enormous grass-cutting reels behind it. These particular metallic monsters were needed to care for the more extensive recreation parks—including football and soccer fields, and a couple of baseball diamonds as well.

Loading and unloading my dad's heftier power equipment on and off the truck was even more strenuous and certainly more dangerous than actually using it on the lawns. Pushing those metallic beasts with all my strength while simultaneously guiding them either up or down two narrow *gangplanks* (into or out of the back of my father's pickup) was an intimidating task at best. It took a fair amount of practice to maneuver and balance those dauntingly massive machines with any sense of ease or safety.

The entire procedure was made especially hazardous because those heavy-duty planks couldn't be positioned so that each exceedingly heavy mower could be guided up into the center of the truck-bed in one straight line. Unfortunately but unavoidably, because two essential metal braces had already been welded onto the only locations where it would have been ideal for the ramp to be placed so as not be off-center, a far more difficult set of maneuvers for bringing the equipment into and out of the truck was required.

Consequently, the only position possible to hitch those loading planks to the truck would aim half of each eight-hundred-pound mower directly into the left wall of the truck-bed. It therefore was necessary to push each massive machine up the planks with all of my strength while revving the motor to full throttle. Then, just before those metal monsters would inevitably rip off the side of the truck completely, I had to steer them sharply to the right. This would prevent much of the machinery from rolling onto thin air for a split second.

While this was happening, I had to keep lifting upward so that the mowers wouldn't plummet to the ground—dragging me along with them. And during this crucial moment after making the sharp right turn, it was imperative to shove them forcefully to the left again, thereby

immediately straightening out the beasts once they touched onto the truck-bed. At that instant, instead of pushing fiercely into the truck, I had to suddenly reverse my efforts by literally digging in my heels, transform my pushing into the most urgent pull imaginable, and simultaneously shut off the throttle so my beastly charge wouldn't go crashing through the back wall of the cab.

Despite having to master these difficult tasks while still only being a scrawny young kid, there was an enormous consolation for all such efforts while helping my father. I quickly discovered that there were many extraordinarily beautiful places where I worked regularly. Certainly, several of the more exotic gardens truly moved me by their exceptional loveliness; and one of the oldest, historic cemeteries captivated my imagination as well. It was there that several famous people were laid to rest and many of the tombstones dated back to the early 1600s.

But the most profound and affecting place for me to spend time happened to be within an intimate little park that surrounded a singularly massive oak tree. At the time, this *Bedford Oak* was thought to be the oldest of its kind in North America.[20] Through ring testing, researchers dated the tree's origins all the way back to the late 1400s.

Just imagine how I felt to be clipping grass strands away from its immense roots. Many of those gargantuan radices extended more than thirty feet from an unimaginably wide trunk; and a great majority of them were considerably broader than I was.

To be working among such powerful tentacles, I often found myself swimming in uncontainable awe and occasionally would weep uncontrollably for no apparent reason. But the truth of the matter was that this extraordinary, primeval tower gave me an overwhelming sense of joy and knowing. After all, what other ancient and venerable life form did I actually know that was thriving here on earth when the Niña, Pinta, and Santa María first arrived in the New World? [21] I frequently felt as though some wisdom of ages had been generously bestowed upon me while I quietly clipped away beneath this overpowering presence.

Once I finished with my trimming duties, I often sat down among the roots and rested my weary back against what I considered to be the most hallowed of boles. After all, this

[20] However, a few years later that honor was bestowed on a more recently discovered oak tree in North Carolina. Ring testing indicated that its earliest years in existence actually were placed before the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215.

[21] These were three Spanish ships led by Cristóbal Colón (Christopher Columbus), reaching the Bahamas for the first time in 1492.

gigantic trunk was a vital part of my most favorite tree in the world.

There, I would sip lemonade and munch on some carrot sticks while waiting for my father to return while he was still able to work with me—before he had his life-altering accident. Because it only took him a few minutes to mow the entire lawn around this tree, he usually left me there while tending to another park nearby, one where my trimming duties were not usually required.

Upon looking upward into the tree's great, vast, vaulted, and multi-layered canopy—constructed with awe-inspiring, all-embracing branches of immeasurable mass—sumptuous piano music that I was then learning to play (including the numerous Nocturnes and Waltzes of Frederic Chopin) often replayed in my head again and again while incalculable quantities of leaves fluttered and waved graciously overhead in accompaniment. A complex collage of floating foliage tossed and twirled, incited by even the gentlest of breezes nudging at it; and with foreseeable certainty, this leafy microcosm perpetually performed the most expressive and exalted of ballets imaginable.

Luxuriant leaves persisted in dancing amid steadfast, unassailable limbs from which they emanated. Their timeless performances were part of an eternal tribute, one offered to the mammoth oaken trunk to which they all owed their otherwise-unattainable blessing of life. In retrospect, those wonderful displays of poetical movement that I frequently witnessed there—transpiring amid steadfast solidity and perpetuity—reminded me more recently of a quote I discovered about Chopin's[22] musical compositions and also about his masterful performances at the piano.

It originally was part of a commentary made by his friend and advocate, the renowned Hungarian pianist and composer, Franz Liszt.[23] He was remarking on Chopin's extraordinarily

[22] Frédéric François Chopin (1810–1849) was a Polish composer and pianist who spent most of his brief adult life in France. Named by his parents at birth, Fryderyk Franciszek Chopin, he became one of the great piano virtuosi of all time. He composed primarily for solo piano and many of his written compositions evolved out of spontaneous improvisations he often performed during intimate salon recitals for which he had achieved great renown. Chopin was considered to be a performer and composer whose "poetic genius was based on a professional technique that was without equal in his generation".

[23] Franz Liszt (1811–1886) was a Hungarian composer, teacher, arranger, conductor, pianist, and organist of the Romantic era. According to *Wikipedia*:

> He was also a writer, philanthropist, Hungarian nationalist, and Franciscan tertiary. Liszt gained renown in Europe during the early nineteenth century for his prodigious virtuosic skill as a pianist. He was a friend, musical promoter and benefactor to many composers of his time, including Frédéric Chopin…

Some of the others he supported and endorsed were Richard Wagner, Hector Berlioz, Robert Schumann, Clara Schumann, Camille Saint-Saëns, Edvard Grieg, Mikhail Glinka, and Alexander Borodin.

insightful and revolutionary use of *rubato*.[24] Previously, rubato was oftentimes conceived and executed in a somewhat random and unconscious fashion—being excessively emoting, inconsistent, erratic, and even jolting at times.

But Chopin made it more like a seamless give-and-take akin to those inhalations and expirations of any breathing creature. His *rubati* tended to succeed in totally bringing to life each of his own musical creations in a way that was never done before:

> Look at these trees, the wind plays in the leaves, stirs up life among them, the trees remain the same, [that is Chopin's rubato]...

I can picture Liszt imagining the forest trees all lined up, one after another, as the metaphorical beats propelling Chopin's music forward . As the slightest breeze might cause their leaves to frolic and sway between each of those woodland pillars of constancy, rubati also have the impetus to push and pull at successive, individual notes—causing them to wax and wane between the various pulses in each musical phrase.

Although my beloved oak tree was only a single stalk, it gave birth to hundreds or even thousands of horizontally outstretched limbs sizeable enough to be imagined as individual trees unto themselves. While humming along with the piano music running through my head, when I gazed up into the lofty layers of that magnificent oak tree, *Chopinesque* rubati were playing out among the leaves right before my very eyes. Among the immoveable was endless movement; beyond the predictable was infinite improbability; and there was joy and infinite wonder upon it all. There was a symphony of silent yet rapturous sound—an airborne ballet of muted or rustling leaves, twigs, and branches—performed with unyielding persistence for this meek and innocent bystander: a youthfully impressionable audience of one.

Only three months after I first made the acquaintance of the Bedford Oak, I entered second grade. My English teacher happened to be an exceptionally kind, elderly woman who continued to teach long after she could have retired. It was readily apparent that she truly loved her vocation. In my first month of classes with her, I had the memorable experience of being introduced to haiku, one of the traditional minimalist forms of free verse first introduced in

---

[24] According to *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary*, it is:

> a fluctuation of tempo within a musical phrase...

In Italian, rubato (plural form: *rubati*) literally means *robbed*. Simplistically speaking, it is like having a beat *stolen* from here, and by stretching it out or squeezing it tighter, it will appear unexpectedly over there instead.

Japan.

At the time, any notion of encapsulating an entire image in three short lines—using five syllables in the first line, seven syllables in the second, and five again in the third—was a bewildering concept for me. Additionally, the contents of these concise verses frequently resonated with the things that I had already discovered while reading those Chinese translations residing in our barn.

In fact, I was so enthralled to learn about haiku that I begged my mother to let me bring a couple of those poetry books to school to show my favorite, new teacher. After having shared these amazing books with her, she immediately asked me if I would like to try writing some haiku for myself. At first, I was overwhelmed by the proposition, but just with a bit of gentle encouragement from this very wise lady, I agreed to the assignment wholeheartedly.

Fortunately, the first of many such projects was given to me on a Friday afternoon, so I would have the entire weekend to think about what to write. As it happened, I had to go with my dad that Saturday morning to trim the grass around my dear old oak tree. After finishing the task, I promptly sat down amid its roots and watched the many cars whizz by this wondrous place without even slowing down to contemplate the magnificent creature residing there.

Mercedes Benzes, Cadillac limos, Rolls Royces, Corvette Stingrays, Bentleys, Jaguars, and Porsches were among the exclusive automobiles that regularly sailed passed where I was sitting. The passengers were either hurrying off to their palatial mansions hidden away on private estates close at hand, beginning the long commute to an office in Manhattan, trekking out to their beach house in the Hamptons, or simply rushing off to the country club down the road for an afternoon of golf, tennis, or sipping cocktails by the pool while instigating (and catching up with) the gossip of the day.

In all the years I helped take care of this magnificent tree, I recall hardly any instances when even a single car would actually slow down so that driver and passengers could glance at it for even the slightest instant; and surprisingly, there were only three times when people actually stopped and got out to walk through the park's wooden gate into this vibrant yet greatly ignored refuge. It was so close to—yet seemingly lightyears away from—the frenetic comings and goings of locals who were forever darting from one social or business engagement to another.

At the time, this small park was encircled by a perimeter of centuries-old stone walls. Part of the appeal this place had for me was how well-insulated I felt from those ongoing human

commotions surrounding the place. I fancied its antiquated fence to be more like a citadel's rampart, while the tree itself provided shelter from various overhead intrusions such as high-flying jets and private helicopters. I further envisioned that verdant awning of leaf and lumber drawing me into a numinous and interminable dimension of ages past and eventualities yet to come.

On that particular Saturday morning, just after being given my haiku assignment the day before, no one stopped or slowed down even a trifle as they whizzed by in their shiny new cars. This display of self-absorbed drivers—aggressively zooming away to whatever destination was ordained for the moment—suddenly transported me back to a busy street scene where I had encountered dozens of pedestrians rushing by a decrepit old woman earlier that year. As she hobbled down the suburban sidewalk at a snail's pace, everyone else just blasted by the poor soul without a glance. Some actually shoved into her without uttering even a single word of regret.

I was the only one who stopped to extend greetings and offer my assistance. She truly did need help with her grocery bags. Those cumbersome bundles that she was obviously having such a difficult time carrying were beyond her ability to manage for much more of a distance than the one she had already trodden.

At the moment when this memory manifested itself vividly within my mind, I was suddenly jolted back into the present where all of those busy folk with fancy cars were rushing by a primordial tree of wonder without ever giving it a split second of acknowledgment, reflection, or appreciation. As I mentally flipped back and forth between these two images—first, to the elderly woman; and second, to my favorite tree—the similarities between both circumstances soon caused me to fall into a state of inexplicable sorrow.

The overwhelming sense of loneliness pierced my young heart. Despite this and also because of it, I reached reflexively into a brown paper bag brought from home, bypassed all of the snacks my mother had packed for me, and continued scrounging around for some writing materials. Finally, I was able to pull out a new notebook intended for my homework assignments and wrote down this simple haiku:

Old oak stands forlorn,

Tired with its drooping branches.

Few notice, few care…[25]

Once the weekend was over and I went back to school the following Monday, I read this poem to my teacher and she enthusiastically encouraged me to continue writing more. She often had us meet in the auditorium during lunch period where she would recite aloud hundreds of haikus (and their slightly more developed brethren known as *tankas*[26]). Afterwards, I was encouraged to talk about them with her, despite the fact that as a young child I was a terrible stutterer. In fact, it was often difficult for me to enter into conversations with anyone—especially when I was with people outside of the family with whom I wasn't very familiar.

Nevertheless, because of these stimulating lunchtime discussions, during the next several months I eagerly wrote down many new haikus and even a few tankas. Unfortunately, that initial haiku is the only one that I can remember now, and all of the subsequent dozens written later were either lost or destroyed many years ago.

By the time I finished elementary school and started junior high, I still went on envisioning that old woman who seemed to be swallowed up in a throng of indifferent bodies on a suburban sidewalk. Simultaneously, I always remembered the never-ending stream of traffic rushing past a singularly splendid oak tree and how the lawn beneath it became hallowed ground. It was where I wrote my first haiku when I was only seven.

With these two striking images indelibly imprinted upon my mind, further visualizations of giant trees, intimate parks, flower gardens, the simple acts of gardening out-of-doors combined with the vicissitudes of human life along busy streets ironically brought me inward as well. All of these activities in the open air drew me into the vast, internal garden where a lifetime of exploration was about to begin.

After having written my initial haiku, several years passed during which I constantly sensed that it needed something extra to complete the thoughts that were continuing to stir

---

[25] In more recent times, I replaced those three lines written above with the following phrases. Slight modifications were made to improve the imagery:

> Old oak stands forlorn,
> Wearied with weighty branches.
> Few notice, few care…

[26] According to *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary*, a tanka is:

> …an unrhymed Japanese verse form of five lines containing five, seven, five, seven, and seven syllables respectively.

within me. So just after becoming a teenager, I decided to write a second version. It no longer could be considered an authentic haiku, but it finally fulfilled my yearnings to expand slightly upon that poem with one added thought.

The newer piece not only personifies (in a sense) the Bedford Oak to resemble that elderly woman isolated on a busy sidewalk, but it speaks more fully of how many of us have the unfortunate habit of being too preoccupied with ourselves to recognize the needs, the wonder, and the beauty of those standing directly before us. I entitled this slightly extended version, "Plight of the Aged":

> The old tree stands forlorn,
> Wearied with drooping [weighty] branches.
> Few notice, few care,
> And those who do…
> Forget.

All of these musings were only the beginning of endless spiritual considerations and convictions percolating beneath the surface of that skinny, frail-looking boy within whom I dwelt throughout most of my youthful years. Increasingly, the dichotomies of living also were becoming blatantly apparent to me: suffering and wellbeing, sickness and health, riches and poverty, rapture and despair. Simultaneously, inner and outer gardens, closely-nit families and lonely, isolated individuals, the vibrancy of youth and the chronic deterioration of my own bodily frame were all a part of the many paradoxical dualities of life that I was just beginning to perceive.

Around the same time that I rewrote my *Bedford Oak* haiku as free verse, I also was becoming acquainted and almost immediately enthralled with the life and poetry of William Blake.[27] Several years later, while still attending college in 1972, I was given a copy of a recent bestseller *The Crack in the Cosmic Egg* soon after it was published.[28] A good friend from high school gave it to me for my twentieth birthday.

While initially perusing that text, I came across a memorable remark quoted from Blake. Although I had first stumbled upon the phrase years earlier, it now resonated more fully and seemed to be aligned with particular ideas that were in the forefront of my thinking at the time,

[27] English artist, poet, and mystic (1757–1827).

[28] *The Crack in the Cosmic Egg: New Constructs of Mind and Reality* by Joseph Chilton Pearce.

albeit the context (in which I was imagining it) was entirely different from that of Blake's intentions:

Man's mind is like a garden ready planted…

Within a brief sentence, Pearce then added that the particulars of the mind's plantings are determined by how they have been weeded, thinned, and nourished. This simple illustration reminded me of similar garden images that I discovered while exploring early Eastern poetry and philosophies since second grade. Subsequently, I would take the next several decades to expand upon these rich little morsels and reinvent their significance, even as my notions of the inner garden gradually evolved into what would eventually become a series of allegories and metaphors—bringing me ever closer to the transformational notion of an actual *mind garden*.

II.

Sudden calamity and a subsequent quest: ushering a parade of epiphanies onto the written page…

As for the actual writing of this book, the initial version began approximately forty-one years after I wrote my first haiku beneath one antediluvian oak tree. I was piecing together parts of the first chapter during the last three months of 2000 even though I did scribble down notes as far back as late July of the same year. However, long before starting a daily writing routine for *The Mind Garden* (its original title), I began sharing my ever–evolving metaphoric ideas with others. The dissemination of said material proceeded from 1995 onward.

Almost immediately, I also started to tutor countless individuals privately in every location imaginable (even deep within wilderness areas on mountaintops and amid the seismic spray of pounding waterfalls and cascades) and also gave numerous public talks on the subject. Such talks were most often given informally; but on occasion, I did have the opportunity to

speak about my ideas in official public venues as well. All of these enterprises aided me in continually developing further the components of my multi-faceted garden metaphor, refining the specifics of that mind garden image within an all-embracing paradigm, expanding upon numerous practical applications to incorporate said paradigm into our daily lives, and designating every phase of our integration process into this so-called gardening system as a simple activity referred to merely as *mind gardening*. Ultimately, each of these ideas was intended to be straightforward enough for anyone to adopt personally.

Eventually, all of my talks and tutorials on the subject evolved into a regular writing routine thanks in part to the encouragement and mild prodding instigated by both students and friends. They repeatedly urged me to put down my ideas in written form. By the end of 2006, I had completed more than four hundred fifty pages of text and had compiled an additional twelve hundred pages of relevant research, all being incorporated within several dozen computer files. At that time, my mind garden opus was evolving into possibly three consecutive books.

In early 2006, I was compelled to begin making extensive preparations for leaving the home where I had lived and worked for nearly a decade; and by April 1st of 2007, almost all personal and professional belongings finally had been boxed and put into storage downstairs. Only a few days thereafter, a freakish yet devastating flood engulfed the entire lower level of that house with over forty-two treacherous inches of subterranean sea. More than fifteen hundred square feet were now submerged. Even countless boxes remaining above the waterline became soaked.

The insidiously insurmountable wetness of the place leached relentlessly upward, causing serious damage to many things that were thought to be out of harm's reach. Ironically, this bizarre occurrence manifested in a geographical location that was nearly twenty-one hundred feet above sea level on the side of a mountain.

Alas, the unforeseen deluge destroyed a substantial portion of what had already been packed away. Almost all computer files, backup disks, and printed copies for the first version of this volume were demolished along with other original prose. Countless poetic, photographic, and musical works were also lost. Normally, multiple copies of everything were kept at more than one location; but because of the upcoming move, it was necessary to store them all together briefly.

Just before the flooding occurred in the spring of 2007, I added several new sections to

the original version of this text. An entirely different introduction had also been written. For several years before disaster struck, daily installments of new material were normally entered into my laptop and then transferred to the office computer at the end of each day. However, during this tumultuous period, several files remained on the laptop after the other computers had been disassembled and packed away.

Fortunately, that trusty little PC always stayed upstairs; so consequently, its contents survived the impending ruination below. Yet, all of my other files for the book had already been relocated to the office desktop, and that computer subsequently had been stowed in the bottom level of the house. It was stacked amid hundreds of boxes containing my hard copies, accompanying backup disks, and nearly all of my other possessions—a significant portion of which soon would be destroyed.

During the last weekend of May 2007, only days before I permanently left my residence and studio of nearly a decade, the bulb for my laptop display stopped working suddenly. I could no long access the contents of that device because everything on its screen seemed to have disappeared. Nonetheless, I decided to take it along when I made a final departure from the house.

Not until a year later was I able to relocate all of those provisionally inaccessible files to another machine. It only happened then that a few 2007 (and pre-2007) *Mind Garden* documents were also revived. However, it would take several months more to rediscover them because I had forgotten completely of their existence. Consequently, a couple of these more recently salvaged sections, first intended for the original version of the book, instead became a starting point from which I began the monumental task of rewriting this entire work.

Prior to the flood, my business had been suffering ever-increasing losses during the previous two years. Shortly after that fateful incident, I was no longer capable of recovering financially; and my monetary situation (in part) forced me to vacate the premises. Ultimately, I was driven into homelessness that lasted well over six months. Although numerous attempts were made to rectify the situation, none succeeded. At that time, there happened to be only three choices available to me: I could linger in various populated, local areas (towns and cities that were southeast and west of where I had been residing), check myself into a nearby shelter for indigents, or venture further north into the mountainous National Forest region.

Because of a serious health condition, it has always been essential for me to avoid exposure to as many chemicals as possible. The briefest contact with even one seemingly

innocuous compound could induce a variety of acute reactions, subsequently exacerbating the chronic, systemic infection that has plagued me since early childhood. Whenever this occurred, I regularly was obliged to endure innumerable life-threatening fevers, excruciating pain in my throat and ears, congested and enflamed sinuses, violent asthma attacks, hours of extreme vertigo, and other equally debilitating symptoms; and to complicate matters further, no conventional medical treatment ever helped to remedy the situation. In fact, almost every prescribed medication I have taken in the past has ultimately aggravated these physical conditions rather than eradicating or even partially alleviating them.

To the inexperienced onlooker, at any given moment I might appear to be perfectly healthy; but within seconds I could suddenly show signs of dire distress and excruciating physical pain quickly mounting. A surprising incoherency, exhaustion, or despair might descend upon me in a flash from being overwhelmed by that pain.

I often would feel as though I were burning up, gag and gasp for breath, and even collapse onto the floor. The usual culprits that brought about these extreme episodes included all kinds of smoke, exhaust, fragrances, soaps, laundry detergents, cleaning products, carpeting, plastics, and paints. Nevertheless, there were countless other blameworthy substances always lurking around the corner as well. No matter how these incidents might begin, they eventually would evolve into an acute upper respiratory infection that usually lasted for days or weeks; but occasionally, they even could torment me for months without cessation.

So, faced with these weighty considerations whenever I made any decision, I finally chose to travel north into the mountains. There, I at least could spend each day in solitude hiking and meditating—while remaining focused upon the task of improving my physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.

After having experienced a series of eventful changes during the following eighteen months, I finally came to stay at an isolated cabin in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont.[29] From there, I began writing the second version of this manuscript. It commenced with a few resurrected fragments composed in (or before) early 2007.

Although the process was certainly challenging—rebuilding a volume that took numerous years to construct initially, and overcoming what undoubtedly had to be a heaping dose of post-traumatic stress—my current rendition not only goes beyond all of my earlier intentions in scope, but also resolves countless conundrums that those first attempts hadn't yet been able

[29] The eastern section of northern Vermont.

to answer. It now covers the entirety of my original material in a manner I find to be considerably more effective, and therefore preferable. In truth, except for the basic concepts stated throughout, this current version of (what is now entitled) *Epiphanies from the Mind Garden* is a substantially different tome.

Yet without the flood's devastation, an ensuing insolvency, and the reemergence of increased illness while living in the cabin, I never would have experienced the many extraordinary and transformational events that subsequently countered each trial facing me earlier. Ironically, without all of the seeming adversities and their wondrous resolutions materializing consecutively in my life, essential changes to this edition never could have been made.

Whenever I became aware enough to implement them, the philosophies found within these pages certainly have been essential tools for transcending the tremendous vicissitudes facing me during those more recent, crucial years; but for decades they also were instrumental in reliably transmuting (what I once thought to be) torment and tragedy into that which can only be deemed as the miraculous.

The sole intention for writing this work has been to offer a collection of musings to all who would choose to listen; and if anyone finds my assessments to be useful and transformative, then I will be truly grateful. *RCM*

- Introduction -

In Pursuit of Eden

I.

"There is nothing new under the sun..." [1]

Admittedly, there is nothing new written here. Some of what I have introduced in this work has also been advocated by Kabbalists, Christian saints, Sufi poets, and other Western mystics for centuries. Moreover, other ideas addressed within these pages have been discussed by Hindu, Buddhist, and other Asian authors throughout the past thirty-five hundred years. In more recent times, inspirational thinkers, spiritual teachers, philosophers, motivational instructors, anthropologists, and even a few quantum physicists have presented and debated some of what can be found in the forthcoming chapters following these introductory remarks.

So why is it that I am writing this; why yet another book? Despite an extensive procession of philosophical, spiritual, and scientific insights, theories, arguments, proofs, technologies, and enlightened teachings that have been offered to humanity for countless generations, still billions of individuals currently suffer deeply and planet earth continues in chaos. This occurs not because our lives offer no answers to eradicate adversity. On the contrary, a solution to end all human plight lies within each one of us this very moment.

The chief metaphor, unveiled within these *Epiphanies from the Mind Garden*, brings to life an age-old image of a garden depicting the nature of all that is: real or unreal, experienced or imagined. The seed that gives birth to every aspect of this cosmos simply is thought. However, looking out over the vast expanse of human history, we only can assume that this garden born in the mind has been seriously neglected. Monstrous weeds overrunning much of the landscape, systematically weakening and strangling the great flowers of human potential, are generated from reckless and unconscious sowing of deadly seeds of thought, seeds of

[1] Taken from the Solomonic verse, Ecclesiastes 1:9, in the Old Testament, "What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun".

dualistic thought, creating a perennial state of unbalance and confusion.

From a very young age, I questioned every aspect of our existence. I was affected profoundly by the seemingly pointless and never-ending strife troubling the whole world. Collective human affliction and the considerable trials affecting my own life led me on a lifelong quest for physical and spiritual healing—not only for myself, but for all who suffer.

The capricious tides of time and living have hurled me across more than seventy years of tumultuous history unfolding while I searched ardently for the verities of our being. Throughout this puzzling passage an essential, initial understanding was uncovered. If I hadn't come to this realization, all other insights subsequently found would have eventually muddled and confused everything else that I had come to perceive about life.

In order to find the truth of who we are, why we suffer, and what certainty can remove that suffering, we must never be bound to our personal beliefs for their own sake. That is to say, there is a great danger of destroying the veracity living in our convictions when we become dogmatic, self-righteous, or fanatical—clinging to our personal beliefs (as if they were the only true beliefs) and insisting that we are the only ones who know the truth. It makes no difference whether we are Christian or Jewish, Moslem or Hindu, Baha'i or Buddhist. It doesn't matter whether our background is North American, Native American, Latin American, European, Middle Eastern, African, Asian, Australian, or Oceanic. Equally, it doesn't matter whether our practices, views, and sensibilities are primitive, advanced, tribal, urban, altruistic, pragmatic, scientific, philosophical, methodical, creative, spiritual, humanistic, religious, relativistic, stoical, atheistic, fundamental, conservative, or liberal…

Every belief system is accepted as being founded completely in truth by most of its believers. Yet why in due course must each belief falter and fragment like all others? Underlying differences of opinion grow out of the thoughts of everyone. Sooner or later, there will be disparities that gain enough momentum from the convictions of some advocates, so that new sects, factions, branches, derivatives, cults, congregations, variations, or upgrades emerge. At one time or another, all ideologies and creeds divide—yet ultimately evolve—in this fashion.

But where does truth fit into this labyrinth? Does verity exist in any belief system? Despite the inevitable changes and breakdowns in every dogma, do our principles persevere in actuality while all others remain false by default, or is each singular creed deluded or only partially true? These are just some of the questions over which I have pondered since childhood.

II.

Grandma and the primordial paradise...

For several years in my youth, it was necessary for me to spend a great deal of time living with my maternal grandparents. My grandmother was a zealous and fervently religious woman who insisted that I begin reading the Bible when I was nine years old. By the time I was sixteen, I had read the complete Old and New Testaments fourteen times, cover-to-cover. During this period of my life, I repeatedly went back to reread selected Biblical books and chapters hundreds of times.

However, the more I studied, the greater my restlessness and uncertainty became. My grandmother's views about God, religion, and the world eventually appeared to me as being overly simplistic, rigid, contradictory, and certainly less reassuring than they once had seemed. Because my thoughts were filled with an increasing number of conundrums I dared not utter aloud, I began going against her wishes by reading and comparing several editions of the Bible not sanctioned by her faith.

Feeling somewhat like the heretical monk, I also secretly consulted concordances,[2] Apocryphal writings,[3] and many historical texts relating to the Bible. I conferred with two religious authorities who befriended me while I was in college. They generously provided their own scholarly translations of Biblical texts written in the original languages, and they also aided me in discovering key scriptural words and passages that have been poorly interpreted and widely misunderstood.

During my late teens and throughout my twenties, I fervently pursued almost a dozen of the world's major religions. I examined as many sacred texts translated into English as I could find. I read the writings of many saints and spiritual teachers. Also, I researched as much historical background on each religion as was possible at the time. I spoke with monks, yogis, Zen masters, and gurus of many persuasions. I discovered and practiced numerous forms of prayer, contemplation, and meditation.

---

[2] An index or reference book giving information about the meaning and context of all listed words. *Concordances* often refer to Biblical concordances.

[3] A group of early Christian writings that are not considered a part of the Old and New Testaments.

To make my heresy complete, I explored various forms of mysticism, several approaches to healing and nutrition, motivational therapies, metaphysics, the use of affirmations, positive thinking, prosperous thinking, psychology, psychiatry, and numerous traditional and nontraditional (including other spiritual and even humanistic) philosophies of the past and present.[4]

Regardless, the more I observed conflicting opinions and ideas, the more I discovered that a great number of their actually untainted and sincere precepts were regularly quite similar or even identical to each other. By furthering my understanding of religion, philosophy, psychology, and anthropology (and other sciences), I no longer found the foremost ideologies of the world incompatible. While beginning to appreciate that the presumed dissimilarities between divergent beliefs in fact were fallacies, I came to perceive that *actual* verities found in the overwhelming majority of beliefs converge to form a simple, all-inclusive truth.

I realized that the so-called differences holy men judge and common people fear, and the contradictions over which scholars argue and nations rally to war, have nothing to do with truth found in any belief. Rather these discrepancies are born out of false conceptualizations, rationalizations, and manipulations of words and ideas. Frequently, they are developed repeatedly from misinterpretations or misrepresentations of their own simple stories, parables originally meant to convey complex concepts to primitive and chiefly illiterate peoples using familiar images and notions.

Explanations of spiritual metaphors, historical accounts, and ancient health codes have commonly been tainted by those with intentions mired in religious, cultural, scientific, and governmental politics. Habitually, these disparities have been manufactured nefariously, riddled with biases born of ignorance, fear, greed, self-righteousness, and a hunger for power. They

[4] That being said, I nonetheless must add here that when I revisited many of these philosophies and belief systems in the early 2000s, I discovered that more and more of the organizations allegedly set up to follow and teach said principles appeared to be also directed by those who increasingly seemed to be using their doctrines in an alternative manner: as a subtle—or not so subtle—means to cajole more and more money away from followers or devotees (in the process) treat them increasingly as unwitting *customers* rather than actually aiming instead to perfect any true spiritual path for themselves and for those who are supporting them.

Moreover, as each decade has passed by, I have also noticed firsthand that an ever-growing number of people in most every faith, occupation, and enterprise appear to be fixated more on the acquisition of money than whatever they supposedly professed to be seeking the money for in the first place. Besides, they almost always justify this *near-obsession* with money and every other sort of materialism (often metastasized into blatant greed) as the sole means to achieve their supposed non-monetary, non-material, spiritual goals and pursuits—including those affecting an entire conversion of their beliefs and ultimately their lives.

It isn't that everything we wish for in this existence of the physical cannot normally come to pass without the aid and support of money, but when money becomes the main and/or exclusive motivation for our so-called faith-driven beliefs and intentions, then we aren't only becoming a conscious initiator of potential scams and deceptions which we will conceivably use to grift others, but we can likewise become the doubtlessly *self-grifted* as well.

are encouraged by those in high position in order to secure additional dominance and material gain for themselves. It is commonly accepted that the distortion of truth has been used to subjugate and enslave followers of the countless ideologies in today's world and throughout our perpetual past.

However, by extracting these falsifications from personal beliefs, we can remove pervasive illusions that have been the source of endless, futile conflict and separation. Indeed, weeding out these deceptions will trigger essential realizations. Seemingly irreconcilable derisions—between those who profess evolution as scientific fact and those who preach creation as spiritual truth—are caused by a misinterpretation or manipulation of one insignificant word.[5]

The act of consistently reassessing our perceptions also can reveal to us that karma and reincarnation are both implied in Christianity,[6] that Hinduism can be viewed as monotheistic,[7] that genetic code is no more than one of the material means through which karma operates in any given lifetime, and that a true comprehension of many non-theistic philosophies is no different than comprehending the true nature of theistic beliefs. By recognizing the similarities (and even the sameness) between most major world beliefs, we can draw closer to understanding the actual nature of a unique, underlying, and unifying element existing in all that is deemed to be true.

---

[5] Some of those who accept the Judaic-Christian creation story, found in the book of Genesis, deem that everything was created by God literally in seven *earth-days*. However, the theory of evolution seems to conflict with this belief, unless we logically consider that the definition of the word *day* has more than one meaning. I once was told by a Jewish scholar that *day* does not necessarily imply a twenty-four hour cycle when used in the Torah—which is the Christian Bible's Old Testament. It also can refer to a time or an age. For example, this definition obviously can be applied to passages such as *in the day*—or time—*of Melchizedek*. According to *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary*, Melchizedek was:

> a priest-king of Jerusalem who prepared a ritual meal for Abraham and received tithes from him…

If the word *day* can refer to an age or an aeon, then there should be no dispute between those who embrace this description of creation and others who accept the theory of evolution. Evolution simply may be the more precise, modern-day explanation of the Biblical *seven days of creation*. Each *day* possibly reflects an extensive time period where certain aspects of the evolutionary process took place. The seventh day of God's resting—watching over what He created—certainly could refer to the current ages that embrace all of human history.

After all, how could the Old Testament author speak of evolution when those living in that primitive, ancient culture never could grasp such concepts anyway? To explain these ideas to people who still accepted the earth as being flat would be useless. Additionally, for us to condemn the evolutionary findings of science as being fabrication (rather than factual) in order to cling to a much-outdated way of speaking also seems equally ineffectual.

Why would our earth-day cycle be used to create an infinite number of other planets where none of those comparable time periods possibly are equal to this twenty-four hour measurement? Accepting such an archaic notion is currently no less functional or credible than the belief that if we traveled to the edge of the world we could fall off.

[6] Expanding upon this topic here would deviate from the intended direction of this work. However, further discussions can be found in Dr. Christopher Bache's *Lifecycles*; *Reincarnation*, by Cranston and Williams; and in Dr. Amit Goswami's *Physics of the Soul*.

[7] I recall a Hindu yogi describing the multiple deities in so-called polytheistic Hinduism as nothing more than the different aspects (or many faces) of God in monotheism. From this perspective, Hinduism is no more polytheistic than Trinitarian Christianity, where the three-fold God is worshipped as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and where praying to various saints and angels also is condoned in certain branches of the religion, i.e. Catholicism and Orthodoxy.

Proceeding through these *Epiphanies from the Mind Garden*, we will explore the essential qualities of this element and determine how to identify and utilize them. In so doing, we can learn to heal all that we are as individuals, as a collective, and as all that we perceive the material universe to be. We will discover our genuine attributes as gardeners of our minds, of our thoughts, of our lives, and of our world. We will come to understand what was meant when Jesus of Nazareth spoke:

> He who believes in me, the works I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do…[8]

While becoming cognizant custodians of creation, it is inevitable that we master our thoughts, our ideas, our emotions, our intensions, our beliefs, and our actions—performing all tasks with total humility, joy, and compassion. At last, let us fulfill that prophetic proclamation:

> Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.[9]

As we explore this mind garden together, my heartfelt aim is that we uncover our path into Eden and come to know and treasure the true nature of this garden of all being.

[8] From John 14:12 in the New Testament.

[9] From Matthew 5:5 in the New Testament, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth". And from Psalm 37:11 in the Old Testament, "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace". Also, from the Islamic text, Hadith of Bukhari, "Have I not taught you how the inhabitants of Paradise will be all the humble and the weak, whose oaths God will accept when they swear to be faithful?"

– Part I –

Unearthing the roots of insight
and bringing them to light…

- Chapter 1 -

Discovering the Garden

I.

A garden of thought is in everything, existing everywhere, enduring evermore...

The mind garden is all that is experienced or not experienced—mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It is consciousness, the unconscious, awareness, and being unaware; it is action, reaction, oneness, separateness, diversity, and dualism. Not only is it the germ and all subsequent outcomes of what is deemed to be probable, but it also encompasses the infinite realms of each possibility and their impossibilities as well. The mind garden equally is cause, effect, endless dichotomies, and all that is universal. It is the ultimate sum and each of its parts.

It is the Garden of Eden, Shangri-La, bleak prairies in purgatory, and the fiery landscapes of hell. It is satoric bliss,[1] the wheels of dharma,[2] all good, and all evil. It is $E=mc^2$ and the Red Sox finally winning the World Series after eight decades of defeat. Any elation we may discover while listening to the Brahms Violin Concerto and the hypnotic beauty found in Indian ragas or a voiceless, desert sunset are all part of this garden. Equally, it resonates the rough, pounding passion of ghetto kids chanting rap and the fear-inducing rhythms of tribal war drums—even those faded by endless pages of history and time.

Each of us, and all that we experience both internally and externally, are part of this garden. Everything that we perceive through time, distance, and space are manifestations within the garden. If those spaces, times, and the distances found therein are simply illusions materialized by thought, as has been theorized by some in quantum physics and spoken of in Eastern philosophy, then these also are part of the garden.

---

[1] Referring to satori, the state of enlightenment in Zen Buddhism.

[2] The fundamental teachings of Buddhism.

If time-distance-space, time and space, or even spacetime were thought of as being the building blocks of reality, and the aforementioned principle of materiality's illusion were condemned as being false, all of these beliefs (regardless of their presupposed opposing nature) would be part of the garden as well. Everything that coincides and everything that contradicts, whether they seem true or false, are a piece of this infinite landscape.

When every one of us looks back through the course of our lives as to what we were taught was our beginning, we could choose to doubt and question where we really come from. Does our actual arrival into the garden occur as we lie dormant within our mother's womb or have all facets of this garden of creation—including each of us—undergone a period of gestation in an individual or collective mind, or in both simultaneously?

Let us consider the first verse from John 1 in the New Testament:

In the beginning there was the Word, and the Word was God and the Word was of God.

Regardless of our own personal views about divinity and the cosmos, if we examine this line further, perhaps we can discover the source of our own lives. What might we speculate that is meant by the *Word*?[3] Is the word no more than an *utterance* of thought made manifest into the world of matter through sound and that a primal word spoken at the very beginning of all things—by virtue of its utterance—was the actual, initial act of fashioning material reality? In light of the most widely accepted theory about the inception of the universe currently, this alleged *primal word* might conceivably have been nothing other than the Big Bang's celestial roar (if not literally, then indeed figuratively).

Could it be that a divine *vocalization* of primordial thought is, in truth, the beginning of us all? Indeed, could such a sacred noise fashion everything that we are, including each of our successive thoughts? And where else would every thought emanate from other than the mind? If thought is nothing more than a seed of potential, we might come to speculate that the mind is actually a womb of limitless potentiality, and from there all of our words and each subsequent thought, idea, emotion, belief, intention, and action (comprising everything else that exists as part of our reality) eventually is born.

While we reflect further upon that hallowed, archetypical *word of creation*, it may also be useful to recognize how important all words have been for as long as we have known how to

[3] *logos*, translated as "word" in English bibles, is a Greek term that encompasses "not just spoken or written words, but also reason, principle, or the underlying order of the universe". So logos is more akin to thought than it is to actual sound.

express our unbounded, silent thoughts through them. This is clearly conveyed by author Krista Tippett in her book *Becoming Wise: An Inquiry into the Mystery and Art of Living*:

> I take it as an elemental truth of life that words matter. This is so plain that we can ignore it a thousand times a day. The words we use shape how we understand ourselves, how we interpret the world, how we trust others. From Genesis to the aboriginal songlines of Australia, human beings have forever perceived that naming brings the essence of things into being. The ancient rabbis understood books, texts, the very letters of certain words as living, breathing entities. Words make worlds.

In the award-winning film *The Book Thief*,[4] Max (a Jewish fugitive) befriends Liesel—a young German girl whose adoptive father had sworn to hide and protect the young man from Nazi oppressors. Living in close quarters, Max and Liesel were forced to share the same room. Consequently, they soon became very close and confided in one another about their pasts.

As the family revived this half-starved fugitive, he quickly discovered that his innocent and inquisitive roommate had an insatiable curiosity for books. Their friendship continued to grow while the young man explained to the girl about how Hitler's followers were hunting him because of his being a Jew.

While introducing her to his religion, he spoke about why the words we use are so vital in Judaism. To inspire Liesel to write down her own thoughts, he gave her an extraordinary gift on Christmas Eve. The only possession that he brought with him to this secret hiding place ironically was a book about Hitler. His carrying such a peculiar article overtly was meant to convince any suspicious passersby that he was an aspiring Nazi and certainly not a Jewish man attempting to avoid being detained by the authorities.

Before presenting this small hardcover edition to his young friend, he blotted out all of the printed text with white paint. He then wrote in his own hand the following inscription:

For Liesel, from Max…

On the next page he then etched one additional word in Hebrew while leaving the rest of the book completely empty.

[4] *The Book Thief*, originally written by Australian author Markus Zusak as a historical novel. Published in 2005, it became a bestseller and was published in several languages. Subsequently, a film adaptation was released in 2013. The script for the movie version was written by Michael Petroni. Directed by Brian Percival, the film's cast included Geoffrey Rush, Emily Watson, Sophie Nélisse, Ben Schnetzer, and Nico Liersch. The musical score was composed by John Williams.

Once Liesel opened his present and began to read the dedication aloud, she had to ask him for an explanation regarding those unfamiliar symbols that she obviously couldn't decipher. After replying gently and expressively to her in Hebrew, he quietly voiced one additional syllable so that she could fully comprehend the meaning of his previous utterances:

Write.

After that, he began to describe the consecratory significance of words in a brief but stirring monologue:

> In my religion, we're taught that every living thing—every leaf, every bird—is only alive because it contains the secret word for life. That's the only difference between us and the lump of clay. A word. Words are life, Liesel.

He then implies that words have the power to shape our destiny while encouraging her with this simple insistence:

> All those blank pages—they're for you to fill.

There are various creation myths where the vocalization of a sacred sound is the initiating component for shaping the entire material universe. One such instance can be found in ancient Hindu writings. A Vedic story tells us of our world being fashioned from Brahma's[5] utterance of the word *Om*.

If we fast-forward to some of our more current scientific discoveries, these ancient ideas will resonate even more fully. In the introduction to Jeffrey Satinover's *The Quantum Brain*,[6] [7] he speaks of how the fundamentals of all living matter resemble thought. Perhaps, this is only because matter actually emanates from nothing other than that elemental seed from which all else is generated:

> …as modern biological science has penetrated down into the *subcellular* levels of living matter, and in particular those that constitute the brain, it has indeed begun to encounter the eerie quantum effects that have confounded physicists for a century. These effects are

[5] In Hinduism, Brahma is god as the creator.

[6] Jeffrey Satinover was a former Fellow in Psychiatry and Child Psychiatry at Yale University. A past president of the C. G. Jung Foundation, he also has been a William James Lecturer in Psychology and Religion at Harvard University.

[7] The complete title of this work is *The Quantum Brain: The Search for Freedom and the Next Generation of Man*.

not analogies, they are real.

...At the subcellular level, matter itself actually looks and behaves (in the words of one physicist) "more like thought" than like the cogs of a machine.

As we deliberate over this depiction of subcellular manifestations resembling thought, it also might be useful to apply such an illustration to the following. While describing certain findings provided by COBE (NASA's Cosmic Background Explorer) in her book *Dark Matter and the Dinosaurs*,[8] physicist Lisa Randall[9] reveals the universe essentially beginning as a formation that was no greater than the tiniest of specks. In other words, if we compare the primal *seed* from which an entire cosmos was created with the wide variety of vegetable, fruit, and herb seeds that we might choose to plant in our backyard gardens, any of those garden seeds presumably would be larger than the initial *grain* comprising the entirety of today's ever-expanding universe:

> In what is certainly among the most mind-blowing discoveries of the last few decades, COBE discovered the quantum fluctuations that were generated when the Universe was roughly the size of a grain of sand, and which are ultimately the origin of you, me, galaxies, and all the structure in the Universe. These initial cosmological inhomogeneities were generated when inflation was ending. They started on miniscule-length scales but were stretched by the expansion of the Universe to sizes where they could seed galaxies and all other measurable structure....

So, when we superimpose these relatively recent scientific suppositions upon the intuitive and spiritual insights from philosophies of centuries past, is it really so difficult to imagine that thoughts are forever growing into galaxies, that words are nothing more than thought blossoming conceivably into its own distinct material resonances, and that words indeed do make worlds?

Before examining further the nature of the mind garden, our purpose in that garden, our responsibilities therein, and how thoughts and words continually shape and direct its infinite functions and purposes, first I must step back into my past and recount how I came to discover

---

[8] The complete title of this work is *Dark Matter and the Dinosaurs: The Astounding Interconnectedness of the Universe*.

[9] Theoretical physicist, author, and the Frank B. Baird, Jr. Professor of Science at Harvard University.

this place. Throughout much of my life, I was burdened with ongoing illness, ever-present hardship, and even the occasional disaster. Despite such seemingly never-ending adversities, I found that out of each critical occurrence I unwittingly would stumble into grace-filled and wondrous outcomes, often though they be only temporary. Sometimes these parading trials (and their resultant miracles) played out on a daily basis; and at other times, it took them weeks, months, or even years to resolve themselves.

While I was young, life appeared to be filled with trauma and confusion. My upbringing was an incomprehensible mixture of highly conflicting beliefs and attitudes. At times, those who were most influential to me offered great hope, courage, inspiration, and love. But because of the persistent difficulties and disruptions in their own lives, those same people would more readily create a totally unpredictable atmosphere of abuse, guilt, fear, and pain. I later came to realize that from the highly emotional experiences that were engrained in my mind during those impressionable years, I created a powerful, internal paradox that could trigger or even cause later in life a manifestation of continuously extreme circumstances, shifting between those that were horrible and others that were monumentally blessed and beautiful.

During my early twenties, I had a close friend who used to phone me on a daily basis. The first thing that he always would inquire about was:

Tell me, what horrible things happened to you today?

After recounting to him yet another bizarre procession of unbelievably disturbing situations, he would make his usual exclamation of disbelief. Then, out of anguish and the need for some sort of emotional release, we would laugh and cry hysterically together. And when an ensuing, seemingly miraculous outcome would unveil itself ultimately, this same friend always gasped in amazement before saying:

It's totally incredible! This could only happen to you.

Despite all of the eventual outcomes that would prove themselves to be exceptionally cathartic and even wondrous at times, I often imagined those constant difficulties—continuing to arise in nonstop succession—as being akin to the heads of Hydra. According to Greek legend, Hydra was a serpentine creature with innumerable heads. If a warrior were valiant and cunning enough to remove one of them in battle, two or more would grow back instantly in its place.

The trials facing me back then also appeared to be multi-headed; and whenever I

managed to resolve even a single one of them, others frequently materialized instantaneously. That period of my early adulthood was always brimming with an unending and exhausting array of problematic situations. I couldn't help but to see my life as being totally hopeless—with innumerable torments surfacing perpetually, one after another.

But also emanating from my thoughts as a somewhat ironic counterweight to these dismal occurrences, I happened to remember several extraordinary verses from ancient China that I first discovered as a young child. Such poetical ideas were among those mentioned in the preface to this book. Yet now, their primordial promises seemed to cry out to me once again, but with greater resonance.

Because I was unexpectedly finding myself befriending individual after individual who practiced the belief that our entire physical universe is created by every thought we think, I was reminded of some bygone words first discovered when I was only about to become seven years old. Forgetting now the precise text used, I can only recapture such a statement through this simple paraphrase:

The mind is a garden, and thoughts are the seeds that shape each blossom of reality.

Immediately, my recollection of those vivid ideas created yet another conflict within my being. Because of the incompatible beliefs imprinted upon me ceaselessly by certain family members, I could only assume that to believe in a world fashioned solely from thought had to be both fraudulent and absurd. Yet, even while trying to forget this contradictory notion during the following few years, it haunted me and confronted my convictions by ostensibly appearing everywhere I went.

Each year passed into the next, and now every circumstance I experienced seemed to be a manifestation of my own thinking from earlier times. This once–seemingly unimaginable speculation (that thoughts are the key to producing and understanding all events in life) finally became integrated into everything I had come to believe.

As I continued to study and teach after this major change took place, it became increasingly obvious how each situation in life evolved from my thoughts, especially those that I repeatedly practiced. Also, even while becoming increasingly familiar with the thoughts, feelings, and life situations of many students, friends, family members, and others, it readily became apparent that what James Allen trusted to be an aphorism indeed was true:

As a man thinketh in his heart, so shall he be.[10]

From the time I was four years old, I studied to be a classically trained musician. As a teenager, there were several years when I averaged between six and ten hours of piano practice daily, sometimes managing as many as fifteen hours in one session. I spent most of my life learning to perfect a musical instrument through the complex and multifaceted aspects of practice.

What is practice but when we repeat anything at least once in succession? I was fortunate to become a highly disciplined practicer while I was young; because later in life, it gave me the ability to utilize countless principles of practice while incorporating them into a surprisingly wide range of applications.

To write about the possibility of a mind garden and not mention practice would be a veritable impossibility. The main purpose of this book is to reveal many insights that I discovered through practice and were proven to be completely life transforming. However, before going into more detail about how practice and thoughts change our lives individually, we must further explore how our individual thoughts (and how we practice using them) affect our collective lives and the entire universe as well.

It is essential to realize that the power and responsibility to transmute everything into a world of brightness and joy lie within each of us this very moment. For centuries, the concept has existed that consciously inspired ideas can alter dramatically the individual and shared human experience. Therefore, we must seriously consider initiating this seemingly unorthodox approach to living and consciously transform our world through the implementation of bold, miracle-inducing, life-changing thoughts.

Although most people do not understand or acknowledge the extraordinary power residing within everything we think, even in unconscious thought, a careful analysis of our daily lives will show that thought has constant and unyielding influence upon the direction and outcome of each moment of our existence. There are those of us who think nothing of carelessly contemplating and worrying the worst has come when they physically cannot do anything about a critical situation. How many individuals do we know personally who moan and complain about

[10] Although the quote, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so shall he be" originally came from Proverbs 23 in the Old Testament, James Allen used this phrase out of context and treated it as an aphorism. His interpretation of this statement, separated from its original meaning and allowing it to stand alone, became the inspired premise for his book, *As a Man Thinketh*, published in 1902.

countless things on a regular basis, things oftentimes that are not directly a part of their lives; and how many times do we see that their seemingly random outbursts of dismay become, on one level or another, unexpectedly prophetic?

They don't think twice about reinforcing and giving added potency to these negative conditions by invoking unconsciously, recklessly, and with enormous, destructive emotion a vast array of extremely negative and toxic thoughts within their minds. But in contrast, if we asked those same people to think and say unorthodox, inventive, constructive things such as the ending of all war and the beginning of unending peace now, or the death of all death and the birth of everlasting life now, most of them would probably think that we were either deluded or actually insane.

However, what if all our suppositions about thought being so powerful really are true, that faith even the size of a mustard seed moving mountains[11] is something that is real in this world, in this century, in this instant? Then isn't it our responsibility to practice finding out how to do this every day, even throughout every conscious moment of our lives?

Do we think that prophecies of doom (of a final judgment day) are cruel, unchangeable messages from an insensitive and uncaring deity or useless myths about the future? Or are they timeless, compassionate warnings offered to countless ages and civilizations throughout history, urging us to shape up today or face the consequences of ultimately being shipped out tomorrow?

How do we heed these prophecies supposing they are true, and what do we do to avert apocalypse? If some of us are resistant to the reality of anything prophetic, then what about the realities of severe climate change, pollution, nuclear holocaust, catastrophes from biological warfare, world hunger, over-population, the increasing threats and realities of pandemics, the potential dangers of artificial intelligence, and any number of other current phenomena that could possibly lead to the extinction of all life on this planet? How can each ordinary person in the world have the ability to move any of these mountains by faith?

The only way we achieve anything in our lives (from playing a musical instrument, to driving a car, to being good spouses and parents, to having a successful business, to doing or having anything worth doing or having) is through practice. As the old story goes:

---

[11] Paraphrase on the following New Testament verse, Matthew 17:20:

> And He said to them: Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there" and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.

> A young boy walking down a street in Manhattan with his violin case in hand stopped an elderly gentleman and asked him, "Excuse me sir, could you please tell me how to get to Carnegie Hall?" [12] The old man threw up his hands in disbelief and cried, "PRACTICE! PRACTICE!! PRACTICE!!!"

Practice is repeating something many times until we get it right. Where does the power of practice begin? It commences in the mind—with thought. And what is faith but a type of ongoing, practiced belief or thought? In order to move the mountain with faith, we must practice daily moving it in our minds with faith. If we want peace, it must be practiced. If we want joy, it too must be practiced. We must not allow an unconscious practice of underlying doubts and fears to *unpractice* our conscious aspirations. We must practice thinking great hopes, saying great hopes, believing great hopes, despite all the apparently contradictory events going on simultaneously within each of our individual lives and throughout the rest of the world.

Before we have the expertise to know how to *do it* so that the desired results manifest in the material world, we initially must *think it*, then replicate it correctly many times in our mind, and subsequently continue this process repeatedly in our words and through our actions until it is perfected. Moreover, we must weed out regularly from our thoughts those things we don't wish in the world and plant in our convictions what we truly desire and need. All great deeds in history have come from singular, supposedly impossible thoughts.

So let us practice believing in boundless blessings and endless miracles, even though that might seem to be implausible when things appear ominous. Certainly if we are ever in a position to take physical action to help any in dire need, then by all means, we must DO IT. But if we are not, we shouldn't sit around unconsciously practicing fears and worries as we watch the news, and then tell everyone we know how terrible things are by mindlessly saying:

What is the world coming to?

If anything can precipitate Armageddon[13] (or some other apocalyptic aftermath), our collective lethargy, apathy, worry, and fear can do it; and we must refuse to indulge.

In order for us to transmute the world in a peaceful way and render invalid any predictions of doom for the earth, we must practice daily. We must envision all souls and earth in perfect

---

[12] Carnegie Hall is one of the world's great concert halls. Located in Midtown Manhattan in New York City, its address is at 881 Seventh Avenue between West 56th and 57th Streets.

[13] In the New Testament, Revelation 16:16, the place of the last battle at the Day of Judgment.

balance. As often as possible, we must practice removing every undesirable perception and idea from our minds, by declaring the instantaneous dissolution of all negative concepts blighting our lives including: war, malice, evil, pollution, disease, hatred, envy, disaster, death, suffering, pain, illness, exploitation, victimization, poverty, waste, greed, addiction, sloth, deception…

Then, without hesitation, we must state that divine grace exists exclusively, and through this grace there is only everlasting joy, compassion, peace, love, honesty, integrity, forgiveness, perfectly balanced and healing solutions for all events, all situations, all people, all things, all souls, all creatures, in this world, and throughout all of creation, now and forever, for our balanced and perfect good, and for the balanced and perfect good of all. This includes the seemingly impossible, instantaneous transformation of how all governments, businesses, religions, societies, persons, and even our physical planet and universe function.

From day to day, even as we continue to face many of the specters of darkness we hope to end, it is of the utmost importance to practice regularly—perfecting an ultimate condition within, where these spiritual shadows can never exist. This isn't to deny or avoid the existence of adversity in today's world; it is only to create an environment where lethal concepts, acting as noxious weeds that are strangling the truest capabilities of humankind, can be extracted from our own inner soil during every waking moment. So simultaneously, during each of these waking moments, we can create infinite space within the fresh, rich topsoil of our minds to sow continually the seeds of paradise.

While nurturing these kernels of thought through daily practice, both in our minds and with our voices, we might consider stating over and over again that the fruit of such seeds grow and flourish unhindered throughout the entire universe and within a single generation of humanity—and that all these miraculous seeds of the heart blossom and manifest their Utopian fruit within every dominion of the physical, the mental, the emotional, the spiritual, this day, this moment, NOW!

Of course, whenever possible we must ultimately take action in the world and bring our practice to the physical level. But in order to prepare for our own appropriate actions and to inspire the right actions of others, it is essential to begin perfecting those actions within our minds by harnessing our minds, by perfecting our thoughts through conscious, diligent, regular practice.

We must practice kindness and compassion in all thoughts, words, and deeds every second of every day. We must believe that we DO have faith even the size of a mustard seed.

It should be our life's purpose to begin these practices without delay; and it is imperative to practice commanding all the mountains in our lives to move now, in the balanced and perfect way, for our balanced and perfect good, and for the balanced and perfect good of all.

Endeavoring towards perfection—or the *perfect good* in life for ourselves and for all that exists—should be one of the primary intentions that we all share, regardless of our spiritual and philosophical predispositions. Yet, it would further add to this discussion if we recall the following words that Christ purportedly uttered:

> Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.[14]

With this in mind, it would be well to note that true perfection cannot be seen simply as striving for grand achievements for their own sake. Mastery and flawlessness only truly exist when they are seated and immersed in love. Anything less are quests driven by vanity alone:

> If... I do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.[15]

This certainly suggests that all of our affirmations, aspirations, and accomplishments devoid of love are ultimately nothing but a lot of noise. They are meaningless.

As we consider thinking and acting upon any such ideas, it is important to remember that not only should we practice affirming and praying for the *perfect good* to manifest and act within our own personal lives, but it is equally vital to make our practices include every need of humanity and of all living souls within the same *perfect good* that we avow, hope, and pray for ourselves. We must practice affirming peace, practice affirming miracles, practice affirming paradise; practice in our hearts, in our minds, in our lives. Practice, practice, practice—and then we can do even more than just play at Carnegie Hall!

There are some who will think it is ridiculous to believe we can change the entire world through thought; and there are those who would hope this could be possible but cannot imagine how. But what the majority of us don't recognize is that we are doing exactly that, every moment of every day. Regrettably, most are doing it unconsciously and haphazardly. However, before we discuss a conscious process that can transform our lives (and the world around us) into harmony and balance, we must continue to examine the nature of practice in more detail.

---

[14] From the New Testament, Matthew 5:48.

[15] From the New Testament, I Corinthians 13:1.

II.

To shape or misshape the world through practice...

"The Elements of Practice and Performance" was the title of a lecture I gave at a New Hampshire college in 1999 while I was working there as artist-in-residence. I was painfully aware that I agreed to speak to over eighty freshmen who knew little or nothing about music, except for what they may have heard on MTV and the like.[16] Rather than speak on an aspect of music that would offer no appeal or importance to most of them, I thought it best to select subject matter that would be useful to anyone, regardless of personal interests.

By choosing to speak about practice and performance, I could definitely introduce the class to my life as a performer and musician. But I would also be addressing how these two topics affect each of us, no matter what our goals are or where our objectives lie. To engage the students immediately, the first thing I asked them when I began to speak was:

> During every moment of every day, what have all of us done repeatedly since the first breath we took in our lives and will continue doing until breathing our last breath on earth?

After a brief pause I answered my own question very quietly…

> We practice and we perform.

Practice is anything we repeat over again; and performance is either a collection or culmination of many practices.

There are numerous levels where we practice and perform, but the basic ones with which we will be concerned are the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Regardless of the levels where we are practicing at any given moment, there simply are eight ways to practice and only four of them can be used at a time. We can practice consciously or unconsciously, consistently or inconsistently, correctly or incorrectly, and completely or incompletely. Obviously, the most

[16] A cable television network that broadcasts rock music videos and other forms of popular music programming twenty-four hours daily, seven days per week. In more recent years, there now are many other cable stations and online channels that broadcast similar content.

desirable results will occur when our practice is conscious, consistent, correct, and complete. (I refer to these as the *Four Cs*.) [17] [18]

Even if we seem to perfect our practice on a specific level by doing it consciously, consistently, correctly, and completely, it doesn't necessarily guarantee a desired or expected outcome. If our given task requires practice on numerous levels, then unconscious, inconsistent, incorrect, or incomplete practice on just one other level, can hinder, alter negatively, or possibly cancel completely the intended results achieved on the level where our practice already appears to be mastered.

It is important to realize that these eight practice types apply not only to the multiple levels found in each individual life but to countless levels existing in groups of individuals that employ thinking both independently and collectively. These groups include: spouses, longtime companions, parents, children, and siblings; families, extended families, and friends; teachers, students, tutors, and mentors; widows, widowers, orphans, and the homeless; employees, laborers, and homemakers; hooligans, criminals, and tyrants; businesses, industries, corporations, and other commercial establishments; churches, temples, cults, and other religious and non-religious hierarchies; scientists, mathematicians, and those practicing diverse forms of medicine and healing; artists, musicians, actors, and other creative and performing types; psychologists, philosophers, historians, linguists, and countless confederations following fields of study, research, and other forms of intellectual pursuit; military, intelligence, political, and propaganda circles; societies, cultures, nations, humanity, species, and an endless array

---

[17] It would be prudent to mention here that practicing or performing the *Four Cs* can never be combined with any unconscious, inconsistent, incorrect, or incomplete practice or performance. Otherwise, truly conscious, consistent, correct, and complete results do not occur.

[18] While making some late revisions to this chapter in 2022, it came to my attention that the term *Four Cs* has five different sets of well-known applications other than the ones I have been teaching and referring to since the mid-1980s. Certainly, my use of the *Four Cs* is most likely the least known of them all, because it was only used as a teaching tool for my more advanced students in music performance during that same decade. Then, in the 90s and early 2000s, I extended these same concepts to embrace my mind garden ideas and techniques while demonstrating them to students in both public and private settings. Nonetheless, for the sake of clarity, curiosity, comedy, and caprice (yet another *Four Cs* in the making!), I will mention those other, more familiar usages below.

First, there are two marketing models:

1. Lauterborn's *4 Cs*, indicating consumer, cost, convenience, and communication.
2. Shimizu's *4 Cs*, indicating commodity, cost, channel, and communication.

Then, there are the *Four Cs* in the diamond industry that indicate gem characteristics and quality: carat, cut, color, and clarity. Finally, there are two more sets of concepts going by the title of *Four Cs*. In both cases, they are used as learning models in education:

1. *The Four Cs of Twenty-First Century Learning* are collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity.
2. The University of Southern California's Project New Literacies website lists four different "C" skills as to create, circulate, connect, and collaborate.

of other groups and sub-groups.

As much as groups practice thinking while interacting within themselves, they also practice thought while relating to other groups or individuals. In each community, there are those whose thoughts and beliefs basically are in agreement with the beliefs of their collective, even when individual beliefs regarding other matters might differ.

But then there are those in groups who resist nonetheless, partially or completely, vocally or secretly, the shared thoughts and beliefs of the others. Actually, we live in a world where inconceivable numbers of opposing thoughts and beliefs are being generated every millisecond of every day, and they have done so throughout the continuance of time. Each of those opposing thoughts and beliefs originated in at least one of the minds of any number of groups, sub-groups, or individuals that have ever existed.

Yet, perhaps the most problematic aspect of this phenomenon is that more than eight billion of us here on planet earth (individually, collectively, and in all sizes of groups and sub-groups) believe with great conviction, that we—including all of our groups—are the only ones who think the right thoughts, have the true beliefs, and know the correct answers. This occurs whether or not we are capable of admitting it to ourselves; and therefore, this condition is a recipe for eternal conflict and strife.

Among us we have conservatives, liberals, moderates, romantics, purists, conventionalists, fundamentalists, relativists, theists, humanists, atheists, hedonists, Eastern thinkers, Western thinkers, New Agers, bigots, sexists, racists, terrorists, hawks, doves, humanitarians, industrialists, ecologists, materialists, ascetics, pragmatists, dreamers, fascists, anarchists, populists… And then there are always nudists, the intelligentsia, and Red Sox Nation!

In this muddy, murky manifestation of mind and thought, how can any of us possibly perceive the actual connection between our own personal beliefs, what we think collectively in each of our groups, and the moment-by-moment unfolding of everything that materializes in our lives and throughout the universe—although that connection is all around us now? This chaos blinds us from perceiving its true nature; and it continues to prevent us from seeing how we manifest our reality, at all times, by what we think. Moreover, such a well-devised and highly-maintained pandemonium is caused by only one thing… PRACTICE! And the only type of practice that can produce such an outcome is when nearly a hundred percent of all who have ever thought and of all who are thinking presently are doing so unconsciously, inconsistently, incorrectly, and incompletely—most of the time or all of the time.

There are those who would argue that what some might consider to be unconscious, inconsistent, incorrect, or incomplete practice is derived from a totally subjective point of view. However, subjectivity exists only when we continue to think within the dualistic parameters that allow opposites to hold their unending and unwinnable battles, where all earthly turmoil originates, and where it continues to thrive.

The features of endless opposites existing in material reality may not seem to be of the dualistic sort that are directly associated with, tending towards, or causing outright any incongruities, discord, persistent striving, yearning, repelling, or wrestling among contraries. Yet, the structure of the universe—as we know it—is a veritable model for such things to manifest.

Atoms binding everything together can be thought of simplistically as being part of this paradoxical nature by virtue of their protons and electrons alone. Moreover, there is matter and antimatter, the magnetic north and south poles, positively charged and negatively charged ions.

Other functions of the physical realm operate correspondingly: being active or dormant, animate or inanimate, hot or cold, male or female. Nighttime envelops simply one side of the planet while daylight simultaneously saturates the other. It is as though everything that exists appears to be affixed to a pendulum, playing a game of tug-of-war, playing the stock market, or riding upon a *cosmic seesaw*. When one side is up, the other is down. When something is winning, an opposite loses. Among contraries, one recedes while the other is on the advance.

Winter can dominate only a single hemisphere during each of its two basic seasons. When one perspective of something is to the right, another will insist the same perspective is to the left. But what makes such things more interesting is: that which is up regularly comes down and that which is down eventually seeks to go up.

And then in the realm of quantum physics, there is the *wave-particle duality*. Author Joseph Selbie describes it below:

> Quantum physics' first counterintuitive discovery was nature's Jekyll-Hyde behavior: Energy can behave like matter and matter can behave like energy. Light can behave like waves or like particles. Atoms can behave like particles or like waves. In recognition of wave-particle duality (as it came to be called) physicists began using the term *matter wave* to describe both energy and atoms rather than specifying whether something is a particle

or a wave.[19]

Even as our understanding of the cosmos expands and we discover that certain phenomena may not *seem* to ride upon any dualistic seesaw, more subtle and even insidious dichotomies are created simply by our recognition of these facts nonetheless. One basic example of this is when astronomers discovered planets that do not rotate on their axes. Night and day never shift back and forth from one side of these distant globes to their other side, thereby creating one zone existing in everlasting light and a further region enduring a state of perpetual darkness.

On certain levels, this condition might be argued as having at least some attributes that are not in constant opposition, regardless of their obvious dissimilarities. However, when such situations actually are realized, then they are still manifesting perhaps one of the most devious dichotomies of all: duality versus non-duality.

Within our nearly 7,000 human languages currently spoken worldwide, there are mechanisms to establish, describe, and reinforce these dualisms in everything that exists. This is true whether we are addressing intangible intellectual concepts, explaining material reality, or envisioning infinite non-material phenomena.

In the English language (along with other Western tongues), there are numerous prefixes that we can combine with virtually every noun, verb, adjective, and adverb to validate an endless number of opposing actualities. *In-*, *non-*, *un-*, *dis-*, *mis-,* and *ex-* are just a sampling of such linguistic devices used.

For example, we act *humanely* or ***in****humanely*. Our community is filled with *believers* and ***non****believers*. What some have done to *do* good in this lifetime, others will stop at nothing to ***un****do*. Many of us gravitate towards individuals who are *similar* to ourselves while shying away from and even rejecting those who are ***dis****similar*. We either *understand* or ***mis****understand* other people; and finally, multiple prefixes are often used in combination: we can choose to ***in****clude* or ***ex****clude* anyone who is in ***dis****agreement* with our own personal views, even while we hope for the day when we will all *agree*.

Despite this multitude of disparities, there is one sure thing that can stop the motion of any dualistic seesaw—and end all otherwise endless rocking and tipping—the unremitting struggle and competition between opposite sides. Conceivably, it is anything in nature that

[19] From Selbie's book *The Physics of God: How the Deepest Theories of Science Explain Religion and How the Deepest Truths of Religion Explain Science*.

equilibrates opposing forces. Philosophically speaking, it could be yin harmonizing with yang or Buddha's Middle Path.[20] It could be salvation, or Yahweh, or Allah, or God. It could be the peace that passes all understanding or the great love *agape*.[21] When occurring in any situation, it simply is BALANCE.

As we pray for peace amid war, we are actually seeking balance. While we are sick and yearn for good health, we might even visualize that balance. When we are too cold and want to get warmer, we are actually seeking balance as well. But in order to find this balance, we naturally don't want so much heat as to burst into flames and char into ashes. However, the truth of the matter in any situation is that we all search for an ultimate and everlasting balance in everyone and everything. Unfortunately, duality is forever ready to beguile us into missing the mark altogether, hurling us past the point of balance, and thrusting us over to the opposite side of the seesaw, again and again.

However, before we discuss balance further, and in order to understand better the tumultuous, unpredictable nature of duality, it is important to continue examining the role of thought in the garden. To better illustrate this, let us create a simple metaphor by imagining each thought as being an intangible seed of energy; and to further facilitate our acquaintance with each of these indistinguishable, untouchable kernels, it would be useful to categorize the entire lot of them into four basic groups:

1. Thoughts that have the potential for giving sustenance and strength are like the seeds of fruits and vegetables.

2. Thoughts that have the potential for transforming into something fragrant and beautiful, offering inspiration and enrichment, are like the seeds of flowers.

3. Thoughts that have the potential for healing and encouraging good health are like the seeds of herbs.

4. Thoughts that have the potential for manifesting into something that saps all strength from the other plants in the garden, weakening them, and potentially altering them adversely (or

[20] Also called the Middle Way.

In Buddhism, it is considered to be the first teaching delivered by Gautama Buddha after his spiritual awakening. As the path to enlightenment, it requires followers to avoid extremes, specifically those of indulgence and asceticism. Simply put, the Middle Way provides a means to practice balance in mind, body, and spirit.

[21] Taken from the Greek, it refers to selfless and spiritual love, especially spoken of in Christianity, pronounced: aa-gaa'-pay.

destroying them completely) are like the seeds of WEEDS.

It is true that some weeds are beautiful and can even be mistaken for flowers. Some flowers and weeds can be used as food, and others have great healing properties. Actually, many thoughts have the attributes of more than one of the four categories mentioned above. Almost all thoughts can be transformed into other types of useful seeds through proper tending and care. Conversely, potentially good seeds in the garden can become toxic by being carelessly, unwittingly, or even consciously poisoned—thereby altering their innate goodness into something malicious and destructive.

We might fabricate many other possible categories of seeds for the garden, or speak of alternative metaphors that could create equally valid analogies other than the ones offered here. But for the sake of clarity and ease, let us employ just these four simple groupings in this discussion:

> Thoughts that bear a resemblance to the seeds of (1)*Fruits* and *Vegetables,* (2)*Flowers,* and (3)*Herbs* all have the potential of bringing harmony and balance to the garden. While thoughts likening to the seeds of (4)*Weeds* grow into manifestations that simply overpower, strangle, and destroy all harmony and balance therein.

Earlier I spoke of the importance of weeding out from our minds the great, negative deficiencies of the world. Immediately thereafter, we must plant positive seeds with qualities of perfect and balanced good. Then, this process must be practiced over and over again as though we were sowing seeds from heaven across the fields of the universe.

If the process were that simplistic, so effortless to decipher and initiate, we certainly would be experiencing a palpable paradise all around us now. But obviously, there is more we must discover before those wonderful affirmations can work in actuality. When we speak of replacing the negative with something positive (or vice versa) we always become susceptible once again of setting in motion even more chaos from that cosmic seesaw. While doing this, we unconsciously continue injecting toxic seeds into our garden's soil—insidious germs stemming from the infinitely prolific, primal source of all weeds: duality.

Every great heroic epic written throughout history amply describes a predicament that duality creates when good overcomes and replaces evil. The noble hero (occasionally with a

band of several noble companions) ventures off on a monumental quest.[22] He must endure unendurable trials and is required to confront and vanquish monsters, sorcerers, nefarious temptresses, and a host of other anticipated or unforeseen evils and seductions. As a reward he receives lavish riches, property, spouses, slaves, enchanted swords, great talismans, sacred jewels, the respect and love of the kingdom, and universal acclaim of legendary proportions.

Mythologist Joseph Campbell speaks of this archetypical mission in a similar fashion:

> The hero must venture forth from the world of common-sense consciousness into a region of supernatural wonder. There he encounters fabulous forces—demons and angels, dragons and helping spirits. After a fierce battle, he wins a decisive victory over the powers of darkness. Then he returns from his mysterious adventure with the gift of knowledge or fire, which he bestows on his fellow man.[23]

But as with all that exists in duality, everything eventually begins to sour. The hero (and/or the members of his heroic company) turn against friends, family, comrades, or society when no longer focused on an intentional quest to conquer evil or to claim a mythic prize for the betterment of humanity. Jealousy and suspicion arise. Greed, lust, and betrayal are born out of the seeds of goodness, nobility, and virtue.

If the story continues, even more perilous threats begin to plague the world. Then a younger, purer, nobler hero appears. He must go off to do battle with these greater evils. But have no fear because the new champion prevails! He returns home in triumph. And this time, because his heart is wiser and more compassionate than his valiant predecessor, he brings a lasting peace and prosperity to the land. Unfortunately, it is not forever.

After he dies and ascends to a hero's heaven, trouble at home starts all over again: good versus evil, right from wrong, time chases eternity, here struggles to there, victory meets defeat, richer or poorer, truth meets deception, youth fights old age, sickness takes health, life faces death. Where does it end? In duality, it never does.

---

[22] While perusing these next few paragraphs, readers should bear in mind that the use of the word *hero* is intended to imply also its feminine form: *heroine*. Several attempts have been made to employ both male and female versions of this word. However, both masculine and feminine pronouns also would have to be incorporated, causing the text to become awkward, cumbersome, and possibly irreconcilable. Despite much deliberation over how to proceed equitably, I found it necessary to choose one gender over the other. Since the majority of historical tales recount the exploits of heroes rather than of heroines, I decided to continue in like manner for the sake of familiarity and consistency. Nevertheless, no matter how I chose to proceed, this issue only demonstrates further the conundrum caused by dualistic opposites, a vital topic that will be examined later in this work.

[23] From Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

Epic stories portray the continuous, dualistic struggle between good and evil, and they have been handed down from generation to generation as spoken stories told at dinnertime, at bedtime, and around the campfire. They have been sung by minstrels traveling from village to village. For centuries, they have been performed in theaters as enacted dramas—spoken, sung, or danced. Now we can purchase a large assortment of these epics at our local bookstore in hardcover, in soft-cover, and as audio books. Or we can experience them at movie theaters, view the films at home on DVDs, and even become the hero ourselves by directly engaging and interacting with the story in video and computer games.

Certainly these tales can instruct, stimulate, entertain, and even inspire us with noble battles and their supposed, final triumph of good over evil. Still there is that underlying message of futility:

> *The bad guys never stop coming. They seem to show up again and again, always ready for the next fight.*

If we are to break the dualistic cycle in our own lives and in the outer world, it is vital to understand that all of what we are, what we see, what we feel, and everything we experience is born in our minds from thought. It wasn't until a couple of decades ago that I recognized that there was a significant reason why we couldn't see the direct relationship between what we think and what occurs in our lives, our society, and (in general) the world. Our civilization is infinitely diverse. There are endless numbers of differing thoughts and beliefs intermixed as an indiscernible concoction of contradictions.

However, it also occurred to me that if we could isolate small groups of people with similar beliefs and ideals, then it might be possible to detect certain observable relationships between their thinking and subsequent manifestations in each of their thought-induced, microcosmic societies. I recalled my interest as an adolescent in primitive cultures[24] and began watching once more occasional programs about communities that were well-isolated from the rest of the world. I viewed documentaries on TV (eventually on video), and I read countless articles and books containing interviews with individual members of various tribal and village collectives.

Through this process, I was able to observe carefully what was being said. With the aid

[24] The following text describing primitive communities does not constitute a scientific study, nor was it intended to imply that here in any way. It merely reflects numerous observations made over the course of years that reinforced my conclusions regarding hundreds of personal experiences. If it can aid the reader in a similar manner or incite further investigation, then it will have served its purpose.

of TV and pre-VHS audiovisual footage, I also examined their body language, eye expression, vocal inflection, and other signs of emotion. These visible signals often could indicate further what kind of thinking might be practiced, aside from thoughts expressed verbally in the recounting of personal stories and experiences. By scrutinizing small groups of people segregated from the influences of modern society, possible connections actually could be seen between their thoughts and a world subsequently unfolding around them that reflected those thoughts.

I recall learning in a high school history class that earlier generations of at least some native peoples living in northwestern North America didn't have a word for murder. Neither did they have any concept of what that actually meant. It didn't exist in their thoughts, and consequently it didn't exist in their world. None of them could conceive even how it would be done until they learned—through the process of imitation—the previously unimaginable act from white settlers.

Tribes and isolated village communities in many other parts of the world (fostering beliefs of joy, hope, and well-being) generally appeared to create an idyllic life manifesting from their own thinking. Tribes having their most influential myths and stories filled with struggle, deception, warfare, and death unconsciously promoted and encouraged their members to harbor thoughts and beliefs of fear, worry, anger, bloodlust, and many other variants of the negative. This unconscious practice seemed to manifest more readily a multitude of events that were turbulent and unhappy.

However, with only limited glimpses into these isolated communities, certainly there is no way of knowing all the hopes and fears that were practiced unconsciously and the long-term effects these practices made upon their lives. But regardless of how positive or negative these communities seemed to be, there still was one thing they each had in common. Ironically, the weeds of duality always were present. If they weren't in the forefront of every individual or collective thought and activity, then they would linger silently in the shadows of unconsciousness—awaiting the moment to change love into hate, joy into sorrow, peace into war.

Yet, any such change in the state of duality never ends with a single transformation. Instead, it will shift back and forth from one side of its contradictory nature to the other. And the process recurs again and again, ad infinitum. No matter who we are, what we do, or where we live, the great epic stories mentioned earlier simply mirror the challenges duality puts before

all of us on one level or another.

III.

Observing a multitude of opposing forces within and around us...

For thousands of years, and in every region of our planet Earth, human beings have been painfully aware of the endless dichotomies of existence. Countless poems, songs, essays, philosophical discourses, legends, and entire religious beliefs continuously celebrate, question, lament, and even worship (or condemn) the perennial shifting between opposites in every aspect of life.

One such poem, found in the Old Testament of the Bible, describes this ever-fluctuating condition of the world through the lyrical and insightful words of King Solomon, chronicled as Ecclesiastes 3:1–8: [25]

> For everything there is a season,
> and a time for every matter under heaven:
>
> a time to be born, and a time to die;
> a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
>
> a time to kill, and a time to heal;
> a time to break down, and a time to build up;
>
> a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

[25] In 1959, American political activist and singer-songwriter, Pete Seeger, incorporated these Biblical lines within the lyrics of his well-known, anti-war protest song "Turn! Turn! Turn!" Because of the international popularity and acclaim that this song has received for over a half-century, the ancient Judaic text that Seeger borrowed also has been recognized, accepted, and immortalized even beyond the borders of race, culture, and religious origins.

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;

a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

To further illustrate these ostensibly *eternal* dualities, it now seems appropriate to include a small, poetic piece that I wrote when I was twenty years old. Simply entitled "Flower Garden", it metaphorizes a garden, not unlike how this entire book utilizes garden imagery to represent the diverse forms of all dualistic and non-dualistic conditions.

However, in these poetical phrases from my youth, the image that I portrayed is ironically of a failing flower personified. It speaks to the other blossoms in the garden about the dualistic struggles of their lives. It reminisces over the vibrancy of youth while facing old age and its own, self-centered sense of mortality and reflects upon a lifetime of personal strivings and the ultimate resignation from all toil:

Why do you suffer child?

Your life is so young and potent.
You are the fragrant bud,
An anxious flower waiting for the moment to burst into full bloom.

Little one,
How very much we do not wish to understand your sorrows now!
We have forgotten all our tender, youthful torments.

But let us not deny the world for you
Because we refuse to remember the pain of growing.

Our fears focus on other sores—memory failing, spirit fading.

So do not cling to us, we barely can support ourselves.
Be strong and independent for we cannot come back to you now.
We leave the garden.

Yet, how our hearts throb,
Looking back once more to see your great vitality—
As our last, shriveled petals fall lifeless upon the soil.

Nearly a decade ago, I composed a hymn to be performed by a couple of local students studying with me and living just across the border in northern New Hampshire. My lyrics were especially appropriate for the Lenten season or even to be sung during Eastertide. But considering the current political climate worldwide with increasingly tumultuous conditions spreading across the globe, those simple lyrics are now relevant at any time of the year, imploring for an end to humanity's endless entrapment in duality by transmuting our sufferings into an ultimate harmony founded within divine love:

Grant us your peace while fury surrounds us,
Bless us with light though darkness abounds,
Kindle our hopes when life becomes hopeless,
And tenderly hold us as the last trumpet sounds.

Transform worldly passions into compassion,
Teach us your mercy when hate enters near,
Keep us from judging while we learn to grow wiser,
Let us vanquish temptation and abolish all fear.

Cleanse our convictions with the ways of forgiveness,
Guide us through trials so your truths may entice
Our dreams to unfold into love and rejoicing,
Resurrect every heart in a new paradise.

There are still three other poems that I wish to include shortly. The first one is a piece that I wrote as a memorial for a well-loved friend who passed away a few years after I moved

to the cabin in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom (mentioned in the Preface) and who I first came to know nearly fifty years ago. Its quiet words honor and eulogize her life of more than seventy years—one which began in battle-scarred Germany during the middle of World War II. She happened to be only a toddler of three when the Nazis surrendered in 1945.

Consequently, the postwar landscape of her childhood and adolescence was one that no doubt filled her subconsciousness with remnants of ash-filled ruins and the ever-present specters of death. These outward manifestations of one of the most horrific catastrophes in recorded history were a mere, material reflection of the spiritual and psychological confusion and uncertainty that most likely was taught inadvertently to and consequently implanted within each intangible fiber of her soul. Even when she didn't witness any of the atrocities first-hand, they were certainly conveyed to her through the stories and memories of those survivors who interacted with her on a daily basis. Regardless of what she did or didn't experience personally, she certainly was affected by the collective thoughts and actions of all those war survivors who had regular influence upon her life.

Germany was materially in shambles as was the psyche of all its citizenry. Not only were Germans a vanquished society, but much of the rest of the world viewed the defeat of Nazism as having eradicated a supremely destructive and evil aberration from modern civilization.[26] So, aside from the shame and guilt that unquestionably influenced the subsequent behaviors and attitudes of future generations of the German people, many of those surviving the war (or born into its aftermath) also had to confront the duality comprised in learning or relearning how to be truthful, instead of persisting with the deceptive behavioral habits spawned by fascism.

This definitely had to be the case here. After all, having been influenced directly by living in a world of pervasive falsehood and betrayal, being shown these things by others who had tasted the Nazi oppression first hand, each surviving citizen ultimately would have to come to terms with this treachery in one way or another—and for better or for worse.

After all, the intrinsic nature of any dictatorial regime is one that creates extensive, toxic webs of subterfuge within every aspect of its culture. In order to avoid imprisonment, torture, and execution, trickery and lies became a well-practiced tool for anyone hoping to endure or escape such horrendous ramifications.

[26] To a large portion of western society at the time, it did seem as if Nazism and its supremely malevolent practices and beliefs were vanquished forever. But less than just a century later, Nazism and other forms of fascism are reviving and spreading like wildfire around the globe. They are simply one of the most recent, grim examples of our unending, dualistic struggles between what is presumably good in the world and what is patently evil.

As a result, for the entirety of her life, my friend struggled silently with many dysfunctions, the lifelong scars born out of her impaired Aryan upbringing. She spent decades battling with the many dualistic demons that her childhood incited. Thus, she often shifted drastically from highly positive behaviors and beliefs to their acute and bitter opposites.

Undoubtedly, she could be seen as one of the most spontaneous, free-spirited, generous, and kind-hearted people with whom I have ever interacted. In contrast, when her own struggles brought her into the dark depths of a turbulent and dichotomous psyche, she also could become inordinately deceptive, begrudging, fearful, bitter, and even vengeful. Despite these extremes, most people who knew her well could do nothing other than to forgive those foibles and love this person for the enormity of her compassionate heart.

Throughout the final decade of life, she suddenly began experiencing a serious degeneration in health and physical appearance. Considering that she was always a very beautiful woman with exceptionally good health (even into her early sixties), illness, serious aging, and the specter of her own mortality became the final dualistic struggles with which she had to contend.

Several years before she finally passed away, medical testing determined that she had congestive heart failure among a handful of other serious conditions. Once the realization took hold that death was soon approaching, she instructed her three children to have her remains cremated. Then they were to spread the ashes upon those clear and deep waters abounding in beautiful Lake Tarleton.

Being perhaps her most favorite place in New Hampshire, this sizable body of water stretches for more than two miles from east to west and has an elevation of more than two thousand feet above sea level. It originally was named as a pond (as to which most New Hampshire lakes were referred by earlier generations) and is situated on a somewhat extensive plateau. This upland region is the home to three other lakes as well: Armington, Constance, and Catherine.

When I first moved to northern New England, I rented a secluded log house that happened to be located between two of these high-country lakes. The entire area was sparsely populated and continues to be fairly isolated even to this day. My friend frequently brought her children up to visit my former wife and me in our home there, and we all would spend many happy hours together.

On the southern banks of Lake Tarleton, a resort hotel used to command panoramic

views of the vicinity. Even though this historic structure was demolished by fire decades earlier, its vast lawns and meadows still were maintained so that regularly trimmed grasses continued to stretch out in every direction—even embracing a sizable portion of the shoreline. Upon those green, swarded fields we frequently witnessed some of the most spectacular displays of Northern Lights found anyplace in *the lower forty-eight*.[27] Additionally, because there were virtually no people living nearby, the well-darkened sky allowed anyone the privilege of viewing shooting stars practically on any night of the year.

During daytime hours, two smaller mountains could be seen jutting upward from those highland meadows, while spectacular vistas to the north revealed countless hills and mountaintops spreading toward a single, isolated peak. That magnificent, ageless summit forever appears more than ten miles away on the horizon, and the first settlers called the place Mount Mouselauke—after the name given to it by local tribesmen hundreds of years before. For centuries, the native population performed various mystical rites upon its wide and flattened crest where rare Alpine flowers grow and allegedly are found in no other place on the North American continent. This lofty sanctuary (partially residing just above the timberline) was considered to be the most sacred ground in all of their ancestral lands.

When the oldest son mentioned to me that he, his brother, and his sister were inviting me to accompany them while they dispersed their mother's earthly remains upon the deep and clear waters of Lake Tarleton, I was inspired to compose the following piece as a tribute—one which we could recite together while bringing her dust to its final resting place. The poem begins by briefly hinting at the terminal heart condition and other dichotomous difficulties challenging her life. But then it focuses on the underlying joy and splendor of an irrepressible spirit that strove endlessly to find true love and happiness. These commemorative lines simply are entitled, "Homecoming":

Be still dearest one and weep no more,
Nor cry out in bitterness from each hurt and hindrance you have suffered
While breathing so erratically beneath God's transient, blue sky.

Rather, be joyful instead.
For we all gather together, floating here quietly, reverently,

[27] *The lower forty-eight* is a common reference to the major portion of the United States or the continental forty-eight states. This obviously excludes both the forty-ninth and fiftieth states respectively: Alaska and Hawaii.

upon a good lake, a bold lake,
The great Tarleton Pond that you always treasured so richly.

Your song-filled voice continues to resound over its grassy banks,
And your boisterous laughter echoes within our minds,
Even touching the distant wilderness shores beyond.

It was here where we always could admire your well-favored colossus
Towering so regally above the northern horizon.
Natives once had named it *Moo-se-(l)au-ke* or simply translated as:
a very bald place.

This sanctified mountain persistently pervades each and every molecule within its grasp
With serene gazes and spectral drumbeats,
Accompanied by ancient benedictions to the waters and earth
beneath its feet.

Do you remember when we sat upon Tarleton's dewy meadows
through many midnight hours long gone by,
Peering towards a heaven brimming with the aurora borealis,
Blazing silent symphonies of color—
so bright, so beautiful, so boundless and plentiful?

Even as universes are born and expand all around us,
the perpetual power of this landscape forever amplifies your soul,
Transmuting it into an infinite and divinely conceived love,
more far-reaching than any mere mortal loving.
Its infinite, formless form constantly reshapes your abiding spirit—
so bright, so beautiful, so boundless and plentiful.

Once again, devoted mother and beloved friend,
we ask you to weep no more.
A vibrant day brings us here to scatter your sacred dust
Into timeless waves that transcend all of our blissful hopes and dreams.

It is here where you will discover renewal, where your great, generous heart must be
restored at last.
Mere ashes are transmuted now into a fresh countenance
of waterfalls and flowers and suns and stars,
While all of your corporeal kisses and kindnesses instantly revive
within the undying embrace of a tireless love fulfilled.

Granted, every human soul may discover the profound pervasiveness found in divine love once it has passed beyond the fetters of mortal life, as is affirmed in the poetic lines printed above. However, the pursuit of love and being loved during our breathing moments on earth too often remains bound by the delusory struggles found within the dualities of attraction and aversion, joining and separation, passion and ennui, joy and sorrow, dominance and submission, fidelity and betrayal—among countless others.

As much as the words in "Homecoming" express my friend's yearnings for transcending the dualistic struggle of experiencing love in this lifetime, it also resonates her ever-present desire to embrace the ultimate love eternal. Similarly, in the widely cherished words of lyricist Jane Griner—and immortalized by the choral setting composed by her husband Daniel Gawthrop—her text to the musical anthem "Sing Me to Heaven" further expresses our desire not only to overcome the dualistic struggles of our lives, but also to merge into them as an unfathomable oneness that can only be found in the inevitable joining of all things in heaven—in other words, melding with divine love. And what better way is there to convey this than through the universal expression of song?

In my heart's sequestered chambers
Lie truths stripped of poet's gloss.
Words alone are vain and vacant,
And my heart is mute.

In response to aching silence
Memory summons half-heard voices,
And my soul finds primal eloquence

And wraps me in song.

If you would comfort me,
Sing me a lullaby.
If you would win my heart
Sing me a love song.

If you would mourn me
And bring me to God,
Sing me a requiem,
Sing me to heaven.

Touch in me all love and passion, pain and pleasure,
Touch in me grief and comfort;
Love and passion,
Pain and pleasure.

Sing me a lullaby, a love song, a requiem;
Love me, comfort me, bring me to God:
Sing me a love song,
Sing me to heaven.[28]

And finally, in the soulful lyrics to Jake Runestad's choral piece "Let my Love be Heard", a similar plea is made. However, this appeal isn't made to any mortal beings, but to angels in the sky:

Angels where you soar
Up to God's own light,
Take my own lost bird

[28] The choral anthem "Sing Me to Heaven" was published in 1991 and has become one of the most widely performed pieces of its kind. If any readers are unfamiliar with this wonderful composition, there literally are hundreds of performances available on the Internet. I would suggest going to YouTube.com where anyone can experience how these tender words are further enhanced by an exceptionally beautiful musical renderings embracing those words.

Since there are just too many performances offered on YouTube, I might recommend two of those several interpretations to which I have listened. They have some unique differences, but I find them equally lovely. "Sing Me to Heaven" can be found on the Kansas City Chorale's 1998 album: *Alleluia—An American Hymnal*. Also, it is among the tracks recorded on Octarium's 2008 release: *Essentials*.

On your hearts tonight;

And as grief once more
Mounts to heaven and sings,
Let my love be heard.

Let my love be heard
Whispering in your wings.
Angels where you soar up to God…
Let my love be heard.

These sentiments are definitely an essential component to fulfill the purpose of any inspirational choral work. But these expressive words can also be spoken, sung, or intoned simply as a private and personal supplication abiding grace for our entire lives—and beyond the grave as well.

In comparison, the following lines of prose by Joseph Campbell describe such individual strivings equally as a noble and archetypal search for love that is instigated by the universal hero dwelling within us all. He poignantly depicts our mystical journey through endless, lifelong trials and inescapable, synchronous, and miracle-induced awakenings.

Such a quest most definitely was one upon which my dear friend fervently embarked for more than a half-century, but it also is something that each of us experiences in one form or another:

> The encounter and separation, for all its wildness, is typical of the sufferings of love. For when a heart insists on its destiny, resisting the general blandishment, then the agony is great; so too the danger. Forces, however, will have been set in motion beyond the reckoning of the senses. Sequences of events from the corners of the world will draw gradually together, and miracles of coincidence bring the inevitable to pass.[29]

Although the above selections of poetical and prosaic text are noticeably different from one another in specific details and overall timbre, they nevertheless address the same potent, persistent dualities that are embedded within the fabric of every individual and in all of our

[29] From Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

earthly cultures—whether they have evolved out of the grand and complex classical civilizations of bygone ages or are remnants of some remote, primitive, tribal villages still tucked away in a forgotten fragment of today's global society. They also resonate quietly the dichotomous struggles ensconced in all of our cherished epic stories of both past and present.

Despite the intimations that each of these examples might reveal, how do we truly begin to surmise the actual nature of our existence, and where must we search to uncover the root of duality in seemingly everything that manifests? For years, I discovered nothing edifying in any such examples illustrating the dichotomies of material reality. Instead, I surprisingly stumbled upon an initial, invaluable insight while recalling years later my maternal grandmother's comforting and frequently humorous readings from the creation story in Genesis.

She adored embellishing as she spoke emotionally, especially while summoning her vocally vivid yet clichéd images of God. Wagging her hands and wiggling her fingers emphatically, she would exclaim with fervor:

> He is great, powerful, and wise. Our heavenly father is terrible, yet loving—the king of kings and the lord of the universe. From his celestial throne he sternly looks down upon his creation to review his handiwork. He created man in his own image. The first man was called Adam. And then he created for Adam a wife, Eve, who was made from Adam's rib. Finally, God brought them into a paradise that was called the Garden of Eden.

I truly relished when *grandma* spoke of the garden. Her face would illuminate and her eyes would sparkle when she told this part of the tale in her musically rich (though mild) German accent:

> Adam and Eve wanted for nothing. They experienced only an utter peace and joy. There was no sickness, no suffering, no aging, no conflict, no killing, no death. All creatures lived in the garden in complete happiness. Everything that existed there was perfect. Adam and Eve walked and talked with God whenever they wanted. He told them to eat the fruit from any tree in the garden, except for one. They were forbidden to take the fruit from the Tree of Good and Evil.

But as the story goes, they were tempted and they succumbed. They ate the forbidden fruit and immediately experienced a new condition. They unexpectedly became aware of their

naked, individually isolated bodies. They felt fear; they felt shame; they felt guilt.

Ultimately, they were banished from the garden. God assigned cherubim with a fiery sword to guard all directions to the Tree of Life, preventing the human couple from ever returning. Everything instantly became separate and disassociated from everything else in the world. This included their relationship to God, the paradise in which they used to live, and their mental and visual perspectives towards one another.

Because Adam and Eve were now cut off from the tree of life found only within the center of the garden, no longer were they able to eat of its fruit. They instead would experience the seemingly ultimate separations found in death and personal loss. Consequently, the mortal condition of suffering allegedly began at that moment, and it has endured through countless generations to the present day.

After hearing and reading this story over and over again for years, I finally found the answer to a question I kept asking myself, one that haunted me for a very long time. If God were solely a heavenly father, a supreme male God sitting upon his throne (like a king looking over his kingdom), how can we explain the line from Genesis 1:27?

> God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them, both male and female alike.

This text most likely uses the first definition of the word *man*, which refers to species, not gender. If both the male and female of the species of man were created in the image of God, God couldn't be portrayed solely as a king on a throne, even though this is what has been handed down to every child raised in Christendom, in the Islamic world, and within the domains of Judaism for centuries.[30] Certainly it was a convenient and useful image for the masters and lords found throughout our long history that favored only the paternalistic society. Moreover, it was especially advantageous politically for kings, emperors, popes, and other patriarchal potentates (including clan leaders and tribal lords) to have a description of God's image be not unlike their own. It enabled monarchs to fabricate, employ, and subsequently abuse and grossly distort any number of notions similar to or indistinguishable from the seventeenth-century concept known as the *divine right of kings*.[31]

---

[30] The concept of a male father-god was taught in many religions. This includes two other monotheistic Middle Eastern faiths: Judaism and Islam.

[31] According to *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, the divine right of kings is:

Undoubtedly, these were never unfamiliar tactics for autocratic leaders to maintain control over their constituency. Caesars of Rome proclaimed their own divinity. Pharaohs of Egypt also declared themselves to be gods. Even some religious leaders have convinced their followers that they were a bona fide god-on-earth or the sole living mouthpiece for an intangible, celestial deity. And most recently, here in the United States we witnessed an unprecedented moment when our then-current president with unmistakable autocratic tendencies actually declared himself over the airwaves to be none other than *the chosen one*.

It is prudent politics for any totalitarian despot to devise a personal image of immortality. Who would dare dispute the decisions made by a tangible god-in-residence? There have been many variations on this theme used across the globe and throughout history, and none of them had anything to do with true divinity or God. But they were exceptional dualistic devices by which entire civilizations could be exploited, yoked, and enslaved.[32]

However, if we consider the words in the verse from Genesis, stating that the species of man was created in the image of God (both male and female alike), does it mean God is equally male and female? No; if we think this way we are doing so in a materially dualistic fashion.

Regardless, throughout history the image of an equally male and female deity has been portrayed in every corner of the world. This was the way many cultures attempted to come to terms with the duality of human existence presumably being conceived out of a unified, all-encompassing deity. One of the most interesting and perhaps unexpected examples of this male-female concept of the divine that I have discovered was when reading this particular commentary on the subject in Joseph Campbell's book entitled *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*:

> The cabalistic teachings of the medieval Jews, as well as the Gnostic Christian writings of

---

> ...the right to rule derived directly from God, not from the consent of the people.

And according to *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary*, divine right is:

> ...the right of a sovereign to rule as set forth by the theory of government that holds that a monarch receives the right to rule directly from God and not from the people (circa 1600).

[32] Similar comparisons and self-proclaimed alliances manufactured by individuals between themselves and their gods have existed throughout the existence of humanity. Even within my own family, my maternal grandmother used her religious zeal—including the notion that she already had been saved because of her passionate declarations of faith—as grounds to manipulate younger members of the clan. When asking her grandchildren to do things that they might not want to do, she often would add admonishingly:

> If you don't do this, you don't love grandma; and if you don't love grandma, you don't love God.

Although such a coercion contradicts important mandates in her own Christian faith, this type of behavior reflects similar unconscious and oftentimes deliberate advantage-taking that regularly has been practiced throughout many aspects of every society and culture worldwide.

> the second century, represent the Word Made Flesh as androgynous—which was indeed the state of Adam as he was created, before the female aspect, Eve, was removed into another form.[33]

However, for our purposes here, let us consider the image of God purely as being that which embodies the eternal, the infinite, the ineffable, and the unseen oneness in everything. It is an actual portrait of the divine consciousness comprising all existence. God's unseen image might be perceived as nothing other than a totally non-demarcated amalgamation of pure, infinite, compassionate spirit and divine thought; and the true nature of Adam and Eve (even after they were cast out of the Garden of Eden and entangled in the dichotomous veils of life and death, the sanctities and sacrileges of mortal sexuality, and the pleasures and torments found in every aspect of earthly life) nevertheless can be perceived as a complete merging of that pure spirit and divine thought. This is also true when considering each of us living in the world today.

Earlier in this chapter, the verse quoted from the Book of John indicates that in the beginning of all things there was the Word. The Word was God and the Word was of God. All words clearly come from thought; and from where else would the Word *that is God* emanate, but from eternal and divinely non-dualistic thought? [34]

[33] Campbell also describes other examples of the male-female god throughout numerous cultures worldwide in the section of his book entitled *Initiation: Apotheosis*.

[34] The word *divine* appears throughout this work and obviously suggests a reference to God. But it also can refer to all that is non-dualistic, meaning everything in its true nature. That is to say, it is universal oneness itself. These ideas will be discussed further in forthcoming chapters.

IV.

Understanding the nature of our own dichotomies...

If we step back into the Garden of Eden, we must ask ourselves seriously, what is the Tree of Good and Evil other than an actual source or metaphorical portrayal of duality? In some translations of the Bible, the Tree of Good and Evil is referred to as the Tree of Knowledge. But realistically, knowledge is solely the mechanism that explains and justifies the workings of the dualistic world in which we live.

When Adam and Eve allegedly ate of the fruit from this tree, suddenly they became aware of their nakedness—their disconnection from God and from each other. They no longer were cognizant of the oneness, the unity, the *BALANCE* found in the garden. They now experienced separateness caused by this new, egocentric apperception of the dualistic boundaries of their bodies countering the oneness they had experienced prior to their expulsion from the garden.

They felt fear, guilt, and shame. They fell out of paradise and could no longer communicate with God. That is because all divine communication is found only within oneness. They now would suffer as all things suffer in duality. They would now experience birth and death, happiness and sorrow, *GOOD* and *EVIL*.

In *Buddha*, by Karen Armstrong,[35] the author refers to legends of an original earthly paradise found in each societal tradition worldwide:

> All over the world, in every culture, these ancient days were depicted in mythology, which had no historical foundation but which spoke of lost paradises and primal catastrophes. In the Golden Age, it was said, gods had walked the earth with human beings. The story of the Garden of Eden, recounted in the Book of Genesis, the lost paradise of the West, was typical: once upon a time, there had been no rift between humanity and the divine: God strolled in the garden in the cool of the evening. Nor were human beings divided from one another. Adam and Eve lived in harmony, unaware of their sexual difference or of the

[35] A world-renowned scholar on religious affairs and former Catholic nun, she also is the author of several best-selling books.

> distinction between good and evil. It is a unity that is impossible for us to imagine in our more fragmented existence, but in almost every culture, the myth of this primal concord showed that human beings continued to yearn for a peace and wholeness that they felt to be the proper state of humanity. They experienced the dawning of self-consciousness as a painful fall from grace. The Hebrew Bible calls this state of wholeness and completeness *shalom*; Gotama[36] spoke of Nibbana[37] [Nirvana] and left his home in order to find it. Human beings, he believed, had lived in this peace and fulfillment before, but they had forgotten the path that led to it.

Within many Asian belief systems, the duality of our material existence is more readily identified, accepted, and discussed than in most Occidental philosophies. Because of this, followers of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism frequently regard the human condition as illusion (*Maya* or *Mara*)[38] and the truth of life is found only in the unity of all things. From a Jewish, Christian, or Islamic perspective,[39] might this oneness of life be found in an ever-present Garden of Eden—a paradise continually eluding most of us? But it does so not because it remains inaccessible in the furthest regions of antiquity, but because we fail to perceive its eternal presence within ourselves. Perhaps it is for this reason that we continue to be deluded by the grand, dichotomous illusions of *Maya*?

Epicurus[40] indicated that men fashioned the gods in their own likeness. Referring to the Genesis passage, "God created man in his own image…", Eckhart Tolle[41] countered ironically

---

[36] Referring to Gotama Buddha (566?–c480 BCE).

[37] According to *Britannica Online Encyclopedia*:

> Although it occurs in the literatures of a number of ancient Indian traditions, the Sanskrit term *nirvana* is most commonly associated with Buddhism, in which it is the oldest and most common designation for the goal of the Buddhist path. It is used to refer to the extinction of desire, hatred, and ignorance and ultimately of suffering and rebirth. Literally, it means "blowing out" or "becoming extinguished", as when a flame is blown out or a fire burns out.

[38] In Vedanta (a chief Hindu philosophy), *Maya*—broadly speaking—represents all illusions creating our dualistic, corporeal existence. This includes the delusion that everyone and everything appear to be separate from everyone and everything else. Additionally, within this veil of *Maya* we crave hopelessly and uncontrollably to ease the pangs of this apparent separateness by clinging to other beings, material objects and possessions, and attaching ourselves to physical, mental, emotional, or even spiritual objectives and desires.

In Buddhism, *Mara* signifies death, rebirth, desire, and the dualities and attachments they represent. The concept of *Mara* often is personified as a demon. Experts think that both the Hindu and Buddhist terms might be related by a common ancestor word.

[39] There are references to the Garden of Eden in the scriptures of all three religions.

[40] Ancient Greek philosopher who lived from 341 BCE–270 BCE.

[41] Current-day spiritual teacher and author.

with the statement that man made God in his own image. These remarks reflect an acute understanding about our genuine misconceptions and illusions of what God and humankind are in actuality.

If we go earnestly and vigilantly into the mind garden and truly open our eyes to the world in which we live, if we begin to realize our function as its caretakers, then we can assume all rightful responsibilities of the conscious gardener. Each duality will crumble and dissolve as we perfect the practice of weeding. While we appraise the world around us from this new perspective, our observations and deliberations no longer will be made without sentience. Our hearts and minds should awaken now.

As we care for this garden, we can uncover what was buried in weeds since the dawn of time. This old, untended landscape that we thought to be so real—indeed, the only reality—must fade away as all dreams and illusions do. While clearing a patch in this garden, so that the fruits of divine equilibrium ripen once more, we will reactivate a most sacred thought: that the Garden of Eden forever enfolds us. As we recultivate this belief through the practice of conscious gardening, we will perfect the techniques to remove instantaneously every ill from the world. Those great troubles mentioned previously in the, death, suffering, pain, chapter must be uprooted once and for all: war, malice, evil, pollution, disease, hatred, envy, disaster illness, exploitation, victimization, poverty, waste, greed, addiction, sloth, deception, and—additionally—each of their illusory, dualistic opposites.

So let us proceed into the mind garden together. We now sow seeds to bring forth the veritable flowers of our lives. They rise while blossoming into certain verity and compassion. We now know with the greatest conviction that we must move all mountains in our lives with an ultimate faith, one which is divinely conscious, consistent, correct, and complete. We now know with the greatest certainty that, through our practice of conscious gardening, the Garden of Eden instantly reemerges. While we forever practice disseminating divine love upon the infinite soil of our minds, this paradise lost[42] reemerges once again as a paradise reborn transcendent.

[42] This alludes to John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*, which was published in 1667.

- Chapter 2 -

Through a Timeless Threshold

I.

The first epiphany into mind gardening...

To enter the garden is nothing more than to recognize that we have been present in the garden always. The instant we step through its gates and become aware of our being here, only one thing has changed. We have changed. No longer do we wander among the weeds of duality, unconscious of our presence and ignorant of our purpose. We have been asleep with no knowing of our true nature. We obliviously have practiced imitating the weeds around us for so long that we too have become weeds ourselves, proliferating duality in whatever we do.

However, there are moments when we have actually removed weeds and cared for the garden plantings intuitively, regardless of the somnolent state in which we have suspended ourselves. The innate desire to tend our garden often arises even in deepest slumber.

But as we become aware of passing through ageless gates into this seemingly elusive sanctuary, we awaken. Sudden sentience may allow us to perceive instantly that we are gardeners, the caretakers of an immeasurable estate. Yet how can we discern what is the true nature of this garden when it has been overrun completely by the grand illusions only dualistic weeds can conjure? [1]

This illusory and pervasive *weediness* has forever driven our personal affairs and all the activities of the world in which we live—while eternally echoing the effects of both similar and identical weeds plaguing humanity since the emergence of antiquity. Even long ago these *botanical pests* have been repeatedly considered, observed, and affirmed. Subsequently, they

[1] Within the mind garden all weeds are dualities, even those that might appear as being non-dualistic in nature. Equally, all dualities are also weeds. Though in actuality they are synonymous. Despite this, I have chosen to use the terms *dualistic weeds* and *dichotomous weeds* repeatedly throughout the following pages. Although some might consider the usage of such terms to be redundant and excessive, it nevertheless is neither. The constant joining of these two sets of words is non-redundant and truly essential. In order not to lose sight of the important concept that these expressions convey, while retaining the metaphorical and poetical images that they invoke, I found it helpful to employ them concurrently and frequently. After all, these expressions are specially designed idioms that were meant to depict the most peculiar, pernicious, pervasive, and paradoxical paradigm discussed in this work.

will continue being nurtured, endorsed, augmented, and proliferated far into the future.

How many times could we look out upon the landscape of our own lives in bereavement and helplessly lament over how so many weedy blights have overtaken everything in the world today? Why do they exist in the first place? More importantly, because of their ostensible omnipresence, we tend to think that to eradicate them (thereby uprooting their existence from the garden altogether) could be nothing more than an unfounded hope, a misbegotten dream, and an entirely futile pursuit.

Such gloomy sentiments indeed must have been contemplated by playwright William Shakespeare when he first wrote down the following lines. Intending for them to be channeled through the incomparable voice of his tragic hero Hamlet, this memorable soliloquy describes our existence as a garden universally unkempt and poisoned:

> How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
> Seem to me all the uses of this world!
> Fie on't! ah fie! Tis an unweeded garden,
> That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
> Possess it merely. That it should come to this![2]

Anyone today could easily cry out upon anguished words similar to those scribbled onto parchment with Shakespeare's illustrious quill more than four centuries ago. The playwright's protagonist became obsessed with and debilitated by the perpetual cruelty, avarice, deception, betrayal, intrigue, hypocrisy, and atrocity in his world. Nevertheless, if we peruse the annals from other centuries past (or even from multiple millenniums further back), couldn't we surmise and bemoan in an equally dismal fashion that this endlessly weedy and rancorous state of affairs is forever an immutable trait of the human dilemma?

Yet if we are so blinded by all of these illusory, dualistic weeds so as to overlook the veritably blessed nature of our existence—and likewise neglect our true purpose within this all-encompassing garden of mind—then we will persist in living beneath the darkened cloud of delusion to which we have become so accustomed. However, if we instead wish to release ourselves from this deceptive, deadly, and dichotomous condition of the world, taking up our

[2] The above passage is from Act I, scene ii of William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. Most commonly known by its abbreviated title *Hamlet*, this masterpiece was written at an unspecified time between 1599 and 1602 and is widely accepted as being one of the greatest plays ever written.

rightful position as conscious gardeners, then we must start behaving as though we were already taking on the tasks of said stewardship.

But how do we begin doing this? In fact, where within this apparently infinite realm infested by weeds will we find the genuine plantings and their seeds, those for which we must care? Where are our fruits and vegetables and herbs; and where are the flowers of this forgotten wonderland? As Hamlet lamented, has the entirety of the garden of our lives essentially been besieged completely and irrevocably by weeds, or is all of the truly virtuous plant-life within this immeasurable abode simply veiled among those pernicious, pervasive undesirables? Aren't they hiding everywhere about us and even concealed deep within?

In order to discover our true purpose as conscious gardeners, it can be useful to examine our own, personal activities while we actually tend to the flowers, fruits, and vegetables we have planted out-of-doors, if we happen to be so fortunate to live in a situation where this is even possible. Whenever we leave to go on a lengthy trip or take an extended vacation elsewhere, any garden gracing the front lawn or complementing our backyard often will be left unattended. So when we come back a few weeks later, what will greet us upon our return is an overgrown jumble of unruly weeds and wild grasses. They most certainly will have crowded and entangled even our most beloved flowers or completely buried a long-awaited vegetable and fruit harvest ripening close to the ground.

However, as we walk up the steps to our front door and observe the visual chaos that has overtaken those favorite blossoms, do we respond by falling to the ground, sobbing and moaning melodramatically, declaring our garden to be totally destroyed by the random harshness and cruelty of the world? Do we then give up on such a source of loveliness, sustenance, and inspiration by declaring it impossible for us to grow anything at all? Would we ever imagine to affirm that any earlier notions about cultivating something so beneficial and inspiring to our lives ultimately was unfounded—that it merely arose out of fleeting and irrational impulses? With this type of attitude, we might as well get out the rototiller, dig up everything, plow over every inch of previously cultivated soil, and allow all further weeds to grow unchecked and run wild across everything!

Of course we would think such a reaction to be totally absurd; or to color our sentiment with a vernacular twist, we might also say:

It's downright bonkers!

But how many times do we truly respond to our thoughts, life's circumstances, and the world in general precisely like this? Only when we practice removing the blights and scarring from this mind garden of ours (that is to say, weeding out duality itself) will we develop a capacity to realize that everything remaining is divine and divinely conscious. After all, each weed stems from duality—ostensibly, from illusion. Yet if we cast away all of these *illusions*, then whatever is left behind will exist entirely within that which is not illusion: the attributes of balance and oneness.

I often have envisioned this balance and universal oneness in the following manner. Despite our seemingly isolated bodies functioning apart from the rest of the world, we nonetheless are an integrally connected quantity with everything else that exists:

> *Although we normally think of ourselves as individual entities—going our separate ways throughout life—and when we pass through the illusory shrouds of death it may appear that each of the collective atoms constituting our finite, physical forms also disseminate and go their separate ways (as our corporeal selves appear to crumble back into the earth). But when we truly understand our role within an infinite garden of the mind, then we will realize that our beings were never truly separate from anything else in the first place. We have always been joined in a cosmic unity.*
>
> *Both simultaneously and paradoxically, we are the actual DNA of that living, breathing entity known as "humanity" and the mitochondria of all creation. Although each of us seems to maintain an individual purpose, we forever balance our appearance of individuality with a genuine functioning within the dynamical and amalgamated whole. We are one.*

By eliminating both ends of the dualistic seesaw, we simply preserve its source of equilibrium—an intangible unity indelibly integrating all that exists. It is within this sacred fulcrum where the genuine plantings of the garden have been concealed from us since the emergence of good and evil, or (more generally speaking) from the dawning of duality.

But while we continue to breathe within our own dualistic weediness, is there anything in this world that we can actually understand and accept as existing with no opposites? What knowable attributes are balanced completely and devoid of dichotomies?

> *There is an infinite love that transcends and heals all earthly love and hate. There is an eternal life that surpasses and conquers mortal life and death. There is an ultimate peace*

> *that overcomes and dissolves dualistic war and peace, turbulence and peace, peace and discontent. Indeed, there also is transcendental joy, transcendental hope, transcendental faith; and finally, there is divine comfort, healing, forgiveness, prosperity, protection, humility, and wisdom.*

All attributes deemed as being divine are simply those things devoid of duality and exist exclusively in sacred fulcrums where the entirety of the garden veritably dwells devoid of weediness. Allegorically speaking, they are the countless stepping stones that pave the Middle Path. Divine attributes embody that which harmonizes all yin with yang; and consequently they are the many faces of God: of Yahweh and Allah, of Christ and Krishna, of salvation, nirvana, and agape. Deep within each one of us, surely they remain the core of our being and the truth of who we really are.

It was proclaimed in the Old Testament that God dwells in his holy temple;[3] and the New Testament states that we are the temple of the living God.[4] Perhaps the most revealing of these Biblical insights is found in the seventeenth chapter of Luke. Verses 20–21 offer perhaps one of the most profound insights found within the New Testament:

> Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'Look, there it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is within you."

In other words, couldn't all of these sentiments also be suggesting that balance, oneness, and divine love (three essential characteristics of divinity) also exist as the actual fulcrum to our own bodily version of the cosmic seesaw?

Because of the strong influences of Greco-Roman philosophy, art, and religion on various aspects of Christianity throughout the centuries, many of the great masterpieces included in Christocentric art (including sculptures, murals, oil paintings, mosaics, and tapestries) provided a visual portrayal of God, the saints, and other inhabitants of the celestial kingdom familiarly reminiscent of artistic renderings from the earlier classical civilizations of Greece and Rome.

---

[3] Referring to verses from Psalm 11 and Habakkuk 2 in the Old Testament: Psalm 11:4, "The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord is on his heavenly throne". Habakkuk 2:20, "The Lord is in his holy temple, let all earth be silent before him".

[4] Referring to verses from I Corinthians and II Corinthians in the New Testament: I Corinthians 3:16, "…that you yourselves are God's temple." II Corinthians 6:16, "For we are the temple of the living God".

They often emulated or reflected those previous styles and content. Christian visual imagery appeared simply to substitute the depictions of the deities—which their predecessors worshipped—with their own ironically monotheistic pantheon comprising the Christian Trinity and a multitude of other heavenly forces. Despite ongoing fears of some of the Christian hierarchy that such graphic representations might incite the worship of idols among the Church's constituency, these artistic representations nevertheless have left a lasting impression on how countless generations of believers have come to perceive their spiritual juxtaposition with God.

A divine residence always was seen as a place that was considered to be inaccessible to mere mortals. The Classical gods dwelt on the summit of lofty Mount Olympus[5] whereas the Christian heaven was portrayed as being even higher above the territories of humankind. All of these notions were based on the antiquated assumption that earthly men and women existed upon a flat earth, an immutable surface situated between the duality of a celestial heaven rising above it, and an underworld lying below.

The supreme Christian Lord often can be seen as situated upon a mighty throne with an assembly of saints encircling that seat of power and an endless angelic host hovering overhead. This certainly is reminiscent of the Greco-Roman king of the gods whose sovereign chair is surrounded by an entourage of lesser deities. In either case, these otherworldly abodes are seen to exist amid the clouds in heaven. Such representations even have misled a majority of modern believers into thinking that divinity remains forever separate from all of humanity—inaccessibly high in the sky.

Even though artistic portrayals of God is prohibited in Judaism, Islam, and some branches of Christianity because these creative renderings are seen as a form of idolatry, there still is a pervasive human belief that the kingdom of heaven is somehow far above us—unapproachable to all those bound by the dense, transient flesh of mortality. However, if what Christ proclaimed

---

[5] Presumably, both the Greek and Roman gods took up residence respectively upon the summit of Mount Olympus in eastern Greece. It certainly is common knowledge that the Greek pantheon ruled from this revered mountaintop. But after the ancient Greek city-states were assimilated into the Roman Empire, whereby a new religion developed out of the traditions and philosophies of its Greek prototype, there also seemed to emerge a corresponding collective of *updated* gods that presumably inherited the dwelling place of their supposed predecessors.

Whether the Romans actually thought of their gods as being totally different from the Greek deities, or if they instead accepted each of them simply as being basically the same (or duplicated) gods renamed, we cannot be certain. Regardless, the personal characteristics of the older divinities appeared to be etched into those of their newer counterparts. As was just mentioned, perhaps the only substantial difference between the Greek and Roman deities were their individual appellations. Suitably, the Romans chose Latin names instead of using Greek ones.

Regarding the home of the Roman gods, they most likely were seen as maintaining a divine Olympian abode, just as the Greeks did. Although hardly any recorded evidence has endured to the present day, there are still a few references in Roman literature implying or stating directly that the deities of the then-current empire indeed dwelt upon the exalted heights of Mount Olympus.

is true and God dwells within us, and the blessed realm also resides there, then aren't all of those aforementioned artistic representations and philosophical concepts merely outward reflections of an infinite *inner* universe?

After all, if earthly mortals were to colonize thousands of planets throughout the stars, and we were standing on any one of them, in which direction would the divine kingdom actually reside? To find its location, there is only one consistent course to take from anywhere—and it leads us inward.

On the other hand, if we literally were to send a probe into any of our blood vessels, to the inner corridors of the human brain, or into any other deep regions of our physical bodies, wouldn't it be just as improbable to find an actual heavenly kingdom there as well? After all, by continually pairing *inner* with *outer*, *interior* with *exterior*, or *within* with *without*, aren't we simply justifying further a seesawing illusion of reality while we seed and perpetuate its dualistic existence?

Nevertheless, whenever we weed out or transcend such dichotomies from our lives in this collective mind garden of ours, we arrive in the place that Christ spoke of when he said that:

> ...the kingdom of God is within you.

So as not to confuse this with our dichotomous understanding of what we often consider to be *within*, I instead refer to this immaculate abode of ultimate love and compassion as the *divine within*. (Keep in mind that while I am indicating anything as being simply *inner*, *interior*, *within*, or *internal*, the *divine within* usually is implied—unless of course when I use such terms to illustrate any particular opposites existing as a wide variety of dualistic pairs.)

A simple way to perceive our ever-presence in the *divine within* is by envisioning ourselves already there—not just after we have died, but persisting throughout every past, present, and future moment here on earth. I can find no other words more adequate to describe this condition other than by introducing here the edifying text written by composer Will Todd.[6] He wrote these words as the lyrics to his choral piece *In This Place*:

> In this place I have been made new;
> I have been gifted jewels beyond price.

[6] William Todd (b. 1970) is an English pianist and composer.

In this place greater dreams are given.
I am made everlasting.

In this place I am light,
In this place, in your sight
I am made everlasting.

In your love, starting and ending;
I will be carried softly to heaven.
In your love I am given beauty.
I am made everlasting.

You give the strength for me to hold,
You are the hope that shines like gold.
In this place I am new.
In your love I am true.

I will fly with angels to this place,
And be made everlasting.

The *divine within* transcends all misleading distinctions between our dichotomous interior and exterior selves, inner and outer worlds, or whatever exists within each of us as opposed to what remains without. There are no walls or boundaries to this *kingdom of heaven*: the *divine within*. It simultaneously is untainted potential and ultimate outcomes. In actuality, it is the entirety of veritable existence.

While being aware of this, consider our dualistic, material universe solely as being fastened upon a two-dimensional representation of reality—or more appropriately, an imperfect impersonation thereof—imprinted on a vast piece of diaphanous parchment. This cellophane-like glaze is nothing more than what ancient Hindus referred to as *Maya*.[7] They further described it as a *veil of ignorance* or *illusion*.

I have often thought of this peculiar *veil* as an indescribably enormous, sticky, yet translucent spider web—in which all of us remain entangled and unceasingly stuck. From any

[7] Recall the brief discussion about *Maya* beginning on page 81 in both text and footnote.

such point of view, everything we perceive within those filmy, incarcerating strands appear wrongfully as our only possible existence, the sum total of reality. While we persist in that web-bound condition, nothing can ever be perceived as either truly real or accurate.

Another way for us to consider the nature of *Maya* is to think of it as if we were overlooking a magnificent flower garden through the glass lens of windowpanes in our upstairs bedroom. However, because we have failed to keep those panes clean, they have collected a serious layer of grime. Such a tenuous film prevents us from seeing the true nature of the garden. In fact, if we were asked to describe in detail anything identified from that murky perspective, all answers we might offer would definitely comprise of either vague assumptions or highly inaccurate observations.

When our own ignorance or limited mindfulness dictates that we operate solely within this sheer, superficially guised veil, that illusory shroud actually drapes itself across the true nature of being. Consequently, we can only imagine the *divine within* as occurring separate from ourselves (on the opposite side of a dirty windowpane). This is the common, dualistic misunderstanding of where the *divine with*in happens to exist despite its actual embodiment of our paper-thin two-dimensionality as well. Thus, whenever we believe exclusively in a dualistic, material universe, we are behaving no differently than those who upheld the antiquated notion that the earth indeed is flat.

Some have spoken of our current existence as a delusory and limited world of beginnings and endings—in contrast to the true, authentic world that is infinite and never-ending. This *authentic* world is comprised exclusively of unity and oneness.

In his book *The Last Battle* (the seventh and final story in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series), C.S. Lewis uses the fantasy world of Narnia to portray his main characters leaving Narnia through a final, seemingly nondescript door. Then, they slowly recognize that they have entered a truer and richer Narnia—one which they eventually discover is the eternal Naria joining all things and all worlds in a sense of oneness and wonder.

Up until recent years, the general consensus in the scientific community was that most major components of the material universe have pretty much been defined and understood already—at least, on a basic level. But as research about the cosmos has continued to progress, increased ambiguities also have arisen. Only a miniscule portion of the universe is now acknowledged as fitting into any category about which there are plausible notions of actual comprehension and certainty.

It is currently believed that the matter and energy we used to think of as the sum total of a material universe is only about four percent of its total *package*. At this time, cosmologists believe that approximately ninety-six percent of our spatial reality is comprised of dark matter and dark energy—two theoretical constructs that, other than their names, are complete enigmas to present-day astronomers. Scientists still don't know what either of them are, where they come from, why they exist, or (for that matter) anything else about their nature. One of the few concrete things that are said about them is that they apparently exist in and around each of us while permeating everyone else, everything, every place, and at all times as well.

While attending a lecture many years ago, I listened to an esteemed scientist speak about dark matter and dark energy—and how they fit in with the tiny, remaining portion of physical reality that we used to consider as being the entirety of the universe. His description sounded to me like those of the ancient Hindus when they were explaining how the thin veil of Maya (our material world) draped over what they thought true reality really was. In a similar fashion, this scientist described the miniscule portion of cosmic space that we actually do know as being like a single wave floating atop the considerable ocean of reality that we do not know.

If we consider how the greatest portion of supposed *tangible* reality is still unfamiliar to us and also remains ostensibly invisible, it would be well to consider reasonable assertions for such an enormous lack of understanding about the presence of a vast majority of all things in existence. Yet, as some physicists are daring to propose currently, there is a perfectly rational reason to explain why everything doesn't necessarily occur within a material cosmos after all. Rather, the physical world actually manifests out of a larger portion of reality known to us as consciousness itself. Another possibility can be best illustrated by adopting the parlance of the mind gardener:

> *Perhaps the "divine within" is none other than that ultimate consciousness, which in turn is perhaps none other than (or at least a portion of) what we speculate as being dark matter and/or dark energy.*

Ultimately, everything that *simply is* dwells not only as the potentialities giving birth to thought, but it also is thought itself and all possibilities stemming from thought. And the truth that exists in all of these is nothing more than divine thought—the source of balance, oneness, and all other attributes considered to be also divine. As mentioned earlier, when I refer to anything divine throughout this work, it is a designation indicating all that is devoid of duality

and consisting of compassionate love exclusively. Many may speak of this solely as God.

Even for those who do not necessarily believe in God—at least, not in any conventional sense—many of them nevertheless intuit the profound nature of what dwells within each living being. Perhaps, that is why the eighteenth-century philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson[8] made the following observation:

> What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.

Aristotle[9] conceived God to be pure thought. Divinity to him was simultaneously both the thinker (or producer) of thoughts and thought itself. Although his perception of God was an abstract and impersonal idea, the view of the divine being bound inexorably in thought is an essential concept that can assist us to understand the actual nature of the mind garden.

It is important to remember that everything we experience in our lives manifests from the thoughts we have sown as individuals and as a collective. This occurs whether they are dualistic in nature (bearing the fruits of illusion or *Maya*) or as implements of transcendence giving birth to balance and oneness.

Each and every thought unfolds from the *divine within* and manifests all aspects of material reality. These are to what James Allen was referring when he aphorized the following Biblical phrase in the Book of Proverbs:

> As a man thinketh in his heart so shall he be.

Here is another of Allen's adages voiced from a comparable viewpoint:

> You are today where your thoughts have brought you; you will be tomorrow where your thoughts take you.

Even a long-standing popular saying expresses a similar sentiment:

> Thoughts are things.

[8] American philosopher, essayist, lecturer, and poet (1803–1882). He headed the transcendentalist movement of the mid-nineteenth century.

[9] Ancient Greek philosopher (384–322 BCE).

The Roman philosopher Plutarch[10] spoke of them in this manner:

> What we achieve inwardly will change outward reality.

In the *Dhammapada*,[11] a collection of Buddha's teachings, one translation indicates:

> You are everything you have ever thought.

And in a more descriptive and poetical fashion, an anonymous writer expands further upon the idea that thoughts create all of reality:

> Our life is shaped by our mind.
> We become what we think.
> Suffering follows an evil thought
> As the wheels of a cart follow the oxen that draws it.
>
> Our life is shaped by our mind.
> We become what we think.
> Joy follows a pure thought
> Like a shadow that never leaves.[12]

All things that manifest materially are merely blossoms, buds, results, and outcomes, whether they are to be considered as the flowers, fruits, vegetables, and herbs of the garden or simply as weedy undesirables. What thoughts we continually practice sowing consciously or unconsciously are the seeds and plantings giving form to those outcomes; and where we cultivate and grow all thought is in the fertile soil of our minds, simply being the *divine within*.

---

[10] Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus (c. AD 46–120) often referred to in English as Plutarch, was a Roman citizen born in Greece near Delphi. His many accomplishments included work as a philosopher, historian, biographer, essayist, priest, ambassador, and magistrate.

[11] The *Dhammapada* translates as "an anthology of statements of the Buddha's teachings". It was derived from the Pali Canon, an ancient source of Buddhist writings. Comprising four hundred twenty-three aphorisms, the work is sectioned into twenty-six chapters. This particular version was translated by Thomas Cleary.

[12] Although this popular quote is attributed to Gautama Buddha by some, it certainly appears not to be the case. Regardless of who wrote it in actuality, these lines aptly reinforce the sentiments expressed herein. Nevertheless, the aforementioned quote does resemble two verses from the Dhammapada cited below. These lines come from a translation by Acharya Buddharakkhita:

> 1. Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts suffering follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox.
>
> 2. Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with a pure mind a person speaks or acts happiness follows him like his never-departing shadow.

This is the womb of thought, the fertile soil of the mind garden, and the veritable origins of all that exists.

However, since the entire manifestation of our material universe often seems synonymous with *Maya* (or illusion), does it mean that we must shed this mortal coil in order to realize and experience the true nature of our reality? To be free of the pains and heartaches of our ostensibly dualistic material existence, must we first die in order to find heaven, nirvana, or satoric bliss? Is this the only option open to us where we can attain enlightenment or reside in paradise, or must we instead accept that there is no way out of this misery, even in death; and is it therefore best to resign ourselves fatalistically to the unfortunate and seemingly futile time allotted us here on earth?

No indeed, none of these are the case. If we follow any such paths of belief leading to predictable, illusion-generating consequences, we are only proliferating and perpetuating more dualistic opposites. Our hope for heaven and the fear of hell, suffering perpetually and a release from all suffering, agonizing over each fetter of mortality only to be liberated into an eternity of oblivion, or simply to live and to die all continue being part of the cosmic seesaw's treacherous trap forever alluring us. It ensnares each animate and inanimate creature within endless realms of opposing and contradictory forces, potentialities, thoughts, ideas, and subsequent physical manifestations.

Actually, the only valid way to regard these multi-faceted illusions—the intricate and infinite threads upon our all-consuming veil of *Maya*, materializing every conceivable and inconceivable duality—simply is to acknowledge all of them as nothing other than a plague of pervasive, dualistic weeds that have overwhelmed and reshaped our mind garden altogether. Up until now, only an occasional individual has consciously discovered an antidote for these noxious and prevalent infestations residing here, as well as offering insights to the rest of us on how to curtail and ultimately eradicate them.

Regardless, it is essential to realize now that the time of apathy and ambivalence about actively tending the garden must end at the moment such awareness touches us. If we wish for our lives not to be immeshed perennially within this current state of weediness, then it is our responsibility to take up metaphoric rakes, shovels, hoes, and all other tools of the diligent gardener and commence with our ongoing obligations of cultivating this landscape—while making essential and regularly required reparations and modifications along the way.

Some individuals might insist that because duality is ultimately an illusion, all we have

to do is ignore those illusions, refuse to believe in them, naïvely continue to go about our own business, and then *all will be well with the world*. However, this type of gullible thinking leads to only one possible conclusion:

an unending harvest of more and more weeds…

We will forever fall into the same trap that enfettered Shakespeare's Hamlet. A sense of helplessness and doom can easily prevail over anyone, and such feelings are simply those fully manifested weeds putting their stranglehold upon us as we continue to ignore our duty as gardeners.

Whenever we leave the mind garden unattended and unconsciously shirk or willfully snub our responsibilities therein, we still must come back to reclaim and restore the forsaken *soil*. Each time there are undesirables that have seized control during these periods of our disregard, weeding must be resumed nonetheless. This task clears a simple way back into equilibrium. It remains an essential and unavoidable part of regular maintenance mastered through conscious gardening.

Unmistakably, no garden ever takes care of itself while being abandoned by its gardener. We either must resume our custodial role or else be caught within a resultant, ever-increasing weediness. As I have mentioned before, as soon as we relinquish our commitments as permanent caretaker, we instead become part of the weeds themselves.

II.

An antidote for living among weeds…

Dualistic weeds in the mind garden largely resemble the backyard varieties found intruding upon any typical flower bed or vegetable plot. This is true in as much as all of them are highly prolific and capable of weakening and ultimately destroying everything in their

proximity if left unchecked. While our untended mind garden persists as a treacherous jungle laden with dichotomous blights, actions-versus-reactions or opposites-against-opposites (all being embodiments of duality) must continuously control our being.

In such a state of flux and imbalance, every attempt to be tolerant and impartial struggles incessantly with even the most negligible of our prejudices. Fairness and honesty constantly are challenged by injustice and deceit. All opposites are nothing other than weeds-in-the-making; and to emphasize a crucial point yet another time, these dichotomous webs of illusions appear and affix themselves upon us while veiling every true aspect of our existence—demanding our recognition of their pervasive appearances as being nothing less than reality itself.

It is vital to comprehend that while we allow such illusions to thrive within our domain, they indeed cause harm, misery, and death even while being mere illusions. This is because our ostensible *lives* automatically become a part of those illusory *storylines* and are controlled by the dichotomous rules governing them. We therefore are subject to inestimable harms, miseries, and deaths of all kinds.

By overlooking these intrinsic elements of duality—underlying mechanisms within *Maya's* illusory veil—we simply strengthen and reinforce their existence and the continuance of all other dualistic weeds. Since we tend to procrastinate in maintaining our garden, oftentimes it no longer appears as an actual garden in the least, but instead seems to have transformed into an impassable, dysfunctional quagmire of strangling vines, venomous thorns, flesh-stinging brambles, and rancorous blossoms persistently poisoning the entire landscape of our souls and our lives.

Eventually, we will discuss how to weed out everything that would hinder this veritable garden from thriving. We will also discover techniques for sowing consciously and exclusively the seeds of what I refer to as *divine attributes* (once again: any genuine offshoots of divine love equally devoid of dualistic opposites) and learn to nurture and care for them while they become healthy and strong in the garden. With this in mind, it is necessary first to distinguish between these essential divine traits and what might be called their dualistic homonyms.[13]

---

[13] A homonym is each of two or more words having the same spelling ***or*** pronunciation. (They can be identical in spelling, identical in pronunciation, or identical in both spelling and pronunciation.) *Pour* and *poor* are homonyms. Also *tear* (tear drops) and *tear* (tear a page out of the book) are homonyms. Finally, *bat* (in a belfry) and *bat* (as in baseball) are homonyms. In the latter case, they're also called *polysemes*.

.

These deceptive *namesakes* are the cause of unending confusion because the seemingly positive sides of many dichotomous seesaws go by the same name as a totally unrelated divine attribute. Because of this quandary, the ever-mutating love within the duality of love and hate is readily mistaken for divine love. Pure, transcendental joy is substituted by joy existing in the duality of joy and sorrow. We tend to confuse any of these divine attributes with dualities, so yet another potential level of illusory opposites is formed: divinity and duality.

This occurs when divinity has been corrupted by a need to control, intellectualize, and manipulate anything that essentially cannot be controlled, intellectualized, or manipulated. Whenever this arises, we are incapable of manifesting true divinity, genuine balance, or actual oneness. Instead, all we create is another well-disguised version of our perennial seesaw.

Upon the insidious seesaw of divinity and duality ride many other illusions: God and humanity, heaven and earth, the saved and the damned, those enlightened and those bound by karma, and even scientific reason and spiritual rationalism. All of these simply are more elaborate dualistic variations. They incite constant contests between seemingly diametric and incompatible forces.

However, moment-by-moment our opposites change and shift, because in every instant our perceptions of what opposes us always change and shift. Impelled by the alluring yet unbalancing illusions of this seesaw, we further strengthen them with ever-modifying, self-righteous justifications for their existence. We reinforce the life of opposites with two of the most potent *fertilizing agents*[14] in duality: judgment and control.

Even those of us who profess never to judge or dominate often do so silently, even unwittingly. Nonetheless, we judge and pronounce (if only to ourselves) that we are the ones who are always right, who are logical, who are intelligent, who are better, who are blessed, who are enlightened, who are saved. We might even do everything in our power to control—either subtly or blatantly—as many others as possible by enlisting them into our ways and beliefs. This is done either intentionally or through seemingly inadvertent methods.

When we employ such approaches to thinking and behaving, dualistic opposites immediately are created and nurtured—where everyone else has to be either wrong, cursed, inferior, deluded, or damned. That appears to be the case unless we are able to convert them of course into our ways of conducting ourselves and how (and what) we accept to be true.

[14] Any weed or divine attribute capable of nourishing, sustaining, or proliferating other weeds or plantings in the garden.

Paradoxically, countless other individuals and groups feel precisely the same way about us. Moreover, an infinite assortment of dualities can also blossom when we judge ourselves to be on the negative, less-advantageous side of the cosmic seesaw or while we accept the judgments and controls of others who condemn us always as being in error, misinformed, ignorant, or stupid.

While some of us may carry an external cloak of tolerance and understanding, there still can be an inner mindset voicelessly proclaiming that we nevertheless are correct, in the knowing, and therefore superior. Also, a hidden impulse frequently activates a preoccupation of *teaching* and *guiding* everyone else as a means by which others ultimately might be held within our own unconsciously maintained sphere of influence. Such behaviors regularly arise even when we suppress and ultimately hide them from ourselves, or simply deny their existence altogether.

We can conclude that if our individual or collective lives contain any dualistic beliefs in God, heaven, enlightenment, science, salvation, or anything else, then our own life stories simply are more-personalized versions of the heroic epics told throughout the ages. And if we choose, we can continue reenacting those struggle-filled stories forever.

But how do we end this folly? How can we detect the actual attributes of the garden that are without duality, without polarity—veritably balanced and blessed? It would be wise to consider the most fundamental of all the genuine attributes: divine love.

All other attributes originate from this pure element. When love does not exist in whatever we believe to be a veritable virtue, such as generosity, wisdom, joy, prosperity, protection, sacrifice, humility (or any other quality we deem as unspoiled by illusion and completely balanced), then we are deceived into sustaining duality only further. Wherever love is not present, true attributes of the garden will not manifest. Only weeds can survive there:

> If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but I do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.[15]

[15] I Corinthians 13: 1–3.

This aphoristic illustration not only restates the single scriptural line cited earlier in Chapter 1, but it then continues into two consecutive verses as well. Together, they fully amplify the notion that even the greatest attributes are worthless without love. For without the presence of pure love, there is nothing but noise—merely chaos, cacophony, and clutter—and can only be likened to illusion. Therefore, anything preached, promised, promoted, or pronounced without love is merely a lot of *hot air* being blown about as the prevailing wind!

In an earlier time and a distinctly contrasting culture, Gautama Buddha nevertheless addressed the same issue from a slightly different perspective:

> However many holy words you read, however many you speak, what good will they do you if you do not act upon them? [16]

Of course, when speaking of taking action upon the holy words we read or speak, it certainly means that we do so with compassionate love; and if we have read or spoken those sacred words without divine love to inspire appropriate action, then indeed any other words spoken or deeds done would be filled with nothing but the delusory *hot air* specified above.

Yet, when considering any of this, there is a simple way to detect when love is truly divine and to ascertain whether or not it is just one more dualistic *noisy gong* or *clanging cymbal*. We must compare its traits with the extraordinary decisive definition of love that follows. If the characteristics of the love in question correspond with this description, then there is reasonable assurance that we have discovered a bona fide attribute of the garden.

> Love is patient, love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; It does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.…[17] The fruit of the Spirit is love.…[18] Whoever does not love does

---

[16] This popular quote paraphrases verses 19–20 found in the Dhammapada. A more literal translation is offered below:

> (19) Much though he recites the sacred texts, but acts not accordingly, that heedless man is like a cowherd who only counts the cows of others—he does not partake of the blessings of the holy life.
>
> (20) Little though he recites the sacred texts, but puts the Teaching into practice, forsaking lust, hatred, and delusion, with true wisdom and emancipated mind, clinging to nothing of this or any other world—he indeed partakes of the blessings of a holy life.

[17] From I Corinthians 13:4–8 in the New Testament. Some earlier English translations of the Bible do not mention the word *love* in this passage. Instead, the word *charity* is used.

[18] From Galatians 5:22 in the New Testament.

not know God, because God is love.... Whoever lives in love, lives in God.[19]

Throughout history and around the world, various faiths and philosophies have used a variety of terms to describe the condition to which I refer as divine love: compassion, agape, charity, benevolence, justice, gentleness, kindness, mercy, love, and righteousness. Even if we choose to interpret these terms as virtues other than divine love, true compassion doesn't exist without the presence of that selfless love—nor can charity, benevolence, justice, gentleness, kindness, mercy, righteousness, and what is called just *love*, plain and simple. Without its balancing essence, all of these other attributes merely are incomplete halves of a dualistic pair of opposites.

Throughout the entirety of Islam's holy Qur'an,[20] it speaks repeatedly of the "mercy of the Lord" and also states more precisely:

My mercy embraces all things.[21]

Judaic and Christian scripture promises:

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.[22]

Another Jewish text—the Midrash, Sifre Deuteronomy—pronounces:

...As the Lord is called righteous and loving, so you be righteous and loving.

A sacred Hindu text proclaims:

To love is to know Me,
My innermost nature,
The truth that I am.[23]

---

[19] From I John 4:8 and I John 4:16 in the New Testament.

[20] According to *Merriam-Webster*, the Qur'an is:

> ...the book composed of sacred writings accepted by Muslims as revelations made to Muhammad by Allah through the angel Gabriel.

[21] From the Qur'an 7.156.

[22] From the Christian Old Testament and Judaic Pentateuch (Torah), Psalm 145:8–9.

[23] Bhagavad Gita 18:55. According to *Merriam-Webster*, this is:

> ...a Hindu devotional work in poetic form. *Bhagavadgītā* literally, song of the blessed one (Krishna) circa 1785.

The Shinto *Oracle of the Kami of Sumiyoshi*[24] affirms:

> …I have no power of miracle other than the attainment of quiet happiness, I have no tact except the exercise of gentleness.

Another Hindu testament to love asserts:

> Love is the firstborn, loftier than the gods, the Fathers & men.
> You, O Love, are the eldest of all, altogether mighty.
> To you we pay homage!
>
> Greater than the breadth of earth & heaven, or of waters & fire,
> You, O Love, are the eldest of all, altogether mighty.
> To you we pay homage!
>
> In many a form of goodness, O Love, you show your face.
> Grant that these forms may penetrate within our hearts.
> Send elsewhere all malice.[25]

In Buddhist writings, the attribute of divine love is often referred to as compassion. The Gandavyuha Sutra[26] attests:

> The Great Compassionate Heart is the essence of Buddhahood.[27]

Although the final passage offered below is not found in any scriptural texts from centuries past, it nonetheless warrants being presented here. Contemporary poet Maya Angelou[28] depicts love in a manner that assuredly is compatible with the other definitions of divine love hitherto

---

[24] Referring to *deities*, *spirits*, or *essences* in Shintoism.

[25] Atharva Veda 9.2.19-20,25. According to *Merriam-Webster*, Atharva Veda is one of:

> …four canonical collections of hymns, prayers, and liturgical formulas that comprise the earliest Hindu sacred writings.

[26] According to *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary*:

> …one of the discourses of the Buddha that constitute the basic text of Buddhist scripture.

[27] According to *Merriam-Webster*:

> …a state of perfect enlightenment sought in Buddhism.

[28] According to *Wikipedia*, Maya Angelou, born Marguerite Annie Johnson (1928–2014) was:

> …an American poet, singer, memoirist, and civil rights activist. She published seven autobiographies, three books of essays, several books of poetry, and was credited with a list of plays, movies, and television shows spanning over 50 years. She received dozens of awards and more than 50 honorary degrees.

mentioned:

> Love recognizes no barriers.
> It jumps hurdles,
> leaps fences,
> penetrates walls
> to arrive at its destination full of hope.

Yet, when we personally act in the guise of these distinctive forms of love, mercy, compassion, kindness, or gentleness, do we also judge, manipulate, control, or condemn—either knowingly or unwittingly? Do we offer things to others because we expect something in return? Are we disappointed or angered if they, to whom we give of ourselves, do not reciprocate in a manner we inwardly expect or require?

While helping those we profess to love, do we feel compelled to advise them—whether or not the advice was warranted or solicited? Are we perturbed or incensed by any rejection of the advice we give? Is the guidance offered truly to help those we are counseling, or do we unconsciously give this advice solely to feel good about ourselves and increase our own sense of self-worth, wisdom, and importance?

If we are moved by those in need so that we pledge our help and support, are we genuinely willing to give that help and support fully and promptly? When those whose needs require them to ask for the assistance we offered, do we fulfill all of our promises completely with joy and enthusiasm or do we become moody and resentful because we never intended to make a real commitment in the first place?

Are those who we allegedly love made to feel guilty and miserable for accepting our love in these cases? When we procrastinate in fulfilling those things to which we have agreed (especially when such promises remain unrealized for months or even years), do we ever truly intend to fulfill them or are we unconsciously hoping that through long delays our promises will be forgotten by those to whom we purportedly pledged ourselves?

But in so doing, such frivolous good intentions become nothing more than lies. Indeed, we are not only lying to those whom we promised to help, but these alleged good deeds transform into lying to ourselves as well; and veritable love is never found in deceit of any sort:

It is better that you should not promise than that you should promise and not fulfill it.[29]

Do we fabricate reasons why we should be annoyed, when we are confronted by those requesting only that we fulfill those things we pledged to accomplish? Why do we back down from offers we made in supposed sincerity, and why do we disregard our vows? Isn't it because they occasionally were made solely to project our intentions as genuine deeds of compassion—to ourselves and to others—without the needed work, sacrifice, or actual love?

It is important to consider these and similar queries regarding each aspect of our lives. Moreover, it is beneficial to reflect upon the additional questions listed below that paraphrase (in an expanded and interrogative form) the profound definition of divine love revealed in the New Testament passage from I Corinthians 13 cited earlier in the book:[30]

Do we think and act kindly and with patience?

Do we rejoice in the triumphs of others and refuse the self-righteous and self-aggrandizing rationalizations that envy tends to manufacture?

Do we reject all impulses of boasting and bragging about ourselves?

Do we forever live in humility without feeling or expressing even traces of arrogance or conceit?

Do we refuse to insist on having our own way?

Do we exhibit enough restraint not to overreact with irritability or resentment—even when such behaviors might seem permissible—because we are simultaneously struggling with illness, fatigue, unhappiness, or experiencing duress of any kind?

Do we reject any need for finding retribution against, wishing ill will towards, or hoping for injustices to come upon those who dislike us or who we dislike—either consciously or unconsciously?

---

[29] From the Old Testament, Ecclesiastes 5:5.

[30] Again, here is that passage from I Corinthians 13 for quick comparison and for adding further emphasis and continuing its relevance to the current discussion:

> Love is patient, love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

Do we rejoice in the truth of all divine attributes so much as not to be tempted to promote or celebrate any wrongdoing?

Do we endure every hardship and bear our shortcomings with fortitude and grace?

Do we fervently believe that all things are possible?

Do we hope for all of those blessed possibilities with a compassionate heart?

Do we insist upon practicing love during every moment of every day—learning to love endlessly because divine love is unending?

Whenever our thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, or actions even partially fail to satisfy each of the aforementioned queries into our ability to maintain love in every situation, then at those moments there is no actual love. And whenever we do not practice living in veritable love, we go back to living in the weeds of duality, as the weeds of duality.

This tends to happen when our attempts at so-called *love* are tainted with worry, envy, impatience, self-righteousness, judgmental behavior, and the like. We also can cloud our efforts at loving with manipulative, condescending, derisive, and even divisive conduct. Can any of us honestly claim when we are behaving in such a way that divine love is truly the impetus of our lives in those moments?

Whenever each of us believes that we are genuinely living our life in love but do not actually exercise love by implementing the *Four Cs*, then our perceptions of loving cannot be divine or essentially real. They are only a distorted mirage of love, having countless dualistic opposites with which they constantly struggle.

Infinite disguises of compassionate love manifest through our continual practicing, accepting, and believing in their dichotomous existence. The repetition of unconscious, inconsistent, incorrect, or incomplete thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions offers rising potency to those counterfeit forms of love—or more succinctly:

the illusions of love…

Our careless and oblivious practices permit such self-justified deceptions to inhabit and dominate each daily activity in which we engage—without our knowing that they are always lingering there. In other words, they seem to control the reality to which we advocate, even if

our acknowledgement and acceptance of them is lost deep within the minutest fragments of oblivion.

Such an obliviousness is found in every worry, fear, judgment, jealousy, insecurity, and all other imbalances we continue to rehearse mindlessly. And most importantly, it manifests and thrives entirely through our beliefs and habits supporting and nurturing its existence per se.

Yet (as an alternative), when we effectively exercise the removal of this breed of illusory life from our own lives, that which remains can be expressed and experienced only as the oneness[31] and balance of actual love. And if we purge all dualities from our lives, then that

---

[31] St. Teresa of Avila referred to this authentic oneness of divine love as spiritual marriage. The following passage can be found in her book *Interior Castle* written in 1577:

> …But spiritual marriage is like rain falling from heaven into a river or stream, becoming one and the same liquid, so that the river and rainwater cannot be divided; or it resembles a streamlet flowing into the ocean, which cannot afterwards be disunited from it. This marriage may also be likened to a room into which a bright light enters through two windows—though divided when it enters, the light becomes one and the same.

In the Hindu Isha Upanishad 6–7 , universal oneness is expressed as follows:

> Those who see all creatures within themselves
> And themselves in all creatures know no fear.
> Those who see all creatures in themselves
> And themselves in all creatures know no grief.
> How can the multiplicity of life
> Delude the one who sees its unity?

Johannes Eckhart (1260?–?1327), known throughout the centuries as Meister Eckhart, was a German mystic and Dominican monk. He spoke of this oneness as a universal eye. Here is a passage from his *German Sermon 12*. I originally discovered it in the *Notes to Text* accompanying the Babinsky translation of Marguerite Porete's thirteenth century treatise *The Mirror of Simple Souls*:

> …the eye in which I see God is the same eye in which God sees me. My eye and God's eye are one and one seeing, one knowing and one loving…

The Roman philosopher Plotinus (205?–270 AD), known today as the father of Neoplatonism, referred to the unity of everything as the *One*. From a paradoxically dualistic perspective, he describes this total union by stating:

> [It] is Everything and Nothing; it can be none of the existing things, and yet it is all.

In the Pacific Northwest, Chief Seattle (c. 1786–June 7, 1866) was a well-respected leader of the Suquamish and Duwamish peoples. He also was very accommodating to the white settlers in the region. Eventually, the city of Seattle, Washington was named after him. When speaking of the relationship his people had with the immigrant white population, and also when addressing ecological concerns, he referred to a type of oneness that was not only spiritually based but also grounded in a simple yet pragmatic logic:

> This we know. The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of earth. Man does not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

The Anglican cleric and metaphysical poet John Donne (1572–1631) described oneness as God being present in everything and thereby joining the entire cosmos in an all-encompassing union:

> God is so omnipresent…
> That God is an angel in an angel,
> and a stone in a stone,

which remains can be defined only as the attributes of divinity itself.

Of course, when I speak of transforming the dualities in our lives into a constant and conscious practice of divine love, I am not describing the attainment of a perfection that can be accomplished overnight, like those superficial fulfillments of fleeting fancies or passing impulses. As with any serious practice, improvements occur after countless hours, weeks, years, decades, and even an entire lifetime (or more) of determined effort.

Remember that we have been diligently rehearsing dualistic thoughts, emotions, and actions—while allowing them to seesaw back and forth between our fears and overreactive self-confidences, worries and forced assurances, both blatant and repressed angers, and antagonisms countered by contrived calms—since we were old enough to begin imitating the dualistic actions and reactions of everyone already practicing them all around us.

So, with this in mind, when we complain that making such changes by weeding out our dualistic behaviors is just too difficult, perhaps we should ask ourselves the following:

> *Is an ongoing conscious practice to fill ourselves (and our lives) with real compassion any more difficult or time-consuming than the random, unpredictable, and disruptive ways with which we have allowed our lives to be tainted for decades, relying upon countless, dualistic imitations of love we have readily and whole-heartedly embraced instead? Taken together, all of the lifelong, weed-ridden outcomes we have almost always instigated and endured were caused by our mindless, unceasing praxes that lead us predictably into situations where we yearned for divine love but could never truly find it—at least, not in a lasting way!*

So, if learning a daily method to submerge ourselves permanently within divine love still seems too difficult to master, then please consider just some of the alternatives:

> *Yes, we can instead go along as we have always done (feeling uneasy, unsettled, and empty),*

---

and a straw in a straw.

An important passage found in Dr. Amit Goswami's *Physics of the Soul* explains the underlying, unifying condition between photons at a distance from each other. It may not illustrate the exact nature of *divine* oneness, but it certainly reinforces the idea that separations created by time and space (and the inherent distances existing within them) are ultimately illusory. It also indicates that the truth of our reality is found in an amalgamated whole:

> Our understanding and acceptance of a transcendent realm of interconnectedness has taken a quantum leap as a result of an experiment in quantum physics conducted in 1982 by a group of French physicists led by Alain Aspect (Aspect, Dalibard, and Roger 1982). This is an experiment in which two correlated photons influence one another at a distance without changing signals. It's as if you are dancing in Los Angeles and your partner is dancing in New York but you are both coordinated in the same dance steps without the aid of television or any other signal-processing device.

often denying completely that we ever had such feelings.

We can continue to shirk and dodge crisis after crisis, struggle after struggle.

We can settle back into an impassive, unending status quo of acquiescence while rejecting any emotional or intellectual resistance to these blind detachments—sweeping them all under the rug of denial.

We can anesthetize ourselves with an overload of distractions, like when we passively submit to hours in front of the TV screen, aimlessly drift about on social media, habitually get high or drunk every weekend, or wander through one shopping mall after another—like a lost soul diverting its focus away from all recollections of grief and guilt.

We can continue to avoid our specters of regret when it comes to personal and professional interactions and relationships.

We can deny that our lives are lacking in joy, unbearably boring, spurious and superficial, broiling paradoxically in contrived turmoil, and—ultimately—utterly unfulfilled.

We persistently can hide all of these specters of disenchantment from ourselves, if we so choose.

And we can even spend the balance of our precious time here on earth bemoaning each of our plights again and again, in a manner analogous to that of Shakespeare's Hamlet so many centuries ago.

So as a grim reminder of what these types of choices can actually signify for the potential outcomes in our own lives, let us revisit—once again—those painfilled words uttered by Hamlet:

How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! ah fie! Tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!

Now, let us examine how these weeds of duality affect us from more specific perspectives.

Here are a couple of examples how our stereotypical struggles to manifest divine love continue to perpetuate elements of dualistic love rather than applying the methods of conscious gardening that weed out duality and nurture divine love exclusively:

> *Parents often tell themselves that they only want good things for their children and normally equate these feelings as simply being love. However, this sort of* loving *might simultaneously be fraught with their unconscious worries and fears for their children as well. Such dynamics could trigger a compulsion to overprotect, manipulate, and even smother.*
>
> *In contrast, other parents (allegedly with the same loving motivation) could justify neglecting their children with the following rationalization. They may well convince themselves that the best way to care for their family is to spend their entire lifetime making more and more money in any way that they possibly can, and at any cost. A common attempt to assuage the guilt for rarely being present in their children's lives is by spending some of the acquired wealth to bribe their kids with a never-ending flood of gifts—including gadgets, games, cash, exotic vacations, shopping sprees, and evenings out to restaurants, shows, and movies.*
>
> *Although these demonstrable acts can be expressions of love, they also can easily descend into an excuse for love, merely disguising an obsessive need for hoarding wealth and acquiring material possessions for themselves and for their families. Moreover, another hidden motivation also could be simply their actual preference for the challenge, obsession, and excitement found in a successful career and active social life, oftentimes digressing into an avoidance of daily domestic responsibilities and familial interactions.*
>
> *In any of these cases, if parents do not know how to balance their actions by weeding out all that would blemish their so-called love, then they will initiate dualistic responses from their offspring. Children may react to said scenarios with annoyance or anger, often lashing out with a wide variety of rebellious behaviors; or they might withdraw into total submission, depression, and even succumb to self-destructive and suicidal tendencies. These types of reactions can manifest readily whenever we consciously or unconsciously employ any of the countless, dualistic counterfeits of divine love.*
>
> *Certainly, these are not the results well-intentioned parents truly desire while loving. But*

> *because worry, fear, and other duplicities are exercised unconsciously while they practice love inconsistently, incorrectly, and incompletely, such yearnings tend to be predictable distortions instead. Any misleading semblances grow and proliferate solely as weeds. All unbalanced attempts to love pull genuine love away from its fulcrum, and our dichotomous seesaw continues rocking back and forth from one end of the dualistic spectrum to the other.*

It would be prudent to remind ourselves continually that everything we think, feel, intend, believe, and do is the result of earlier practice, the beginning of new practice, or the continuation of ongoing practice. Equally, whenever we think **thoughts**, develop **ideas**, feel **emotions**, form **intentions**, express **beliefs,** or carry out **actions** for at least a second time, we merely are strengthening and validating them into material existence through repetitive practice.

Even when many of us disbelieve that some seemingly implausible idea, bizarre thought, or revolutionary concept can actually unfold and come into being, history has proven time and again that when enough practiced thought and belief is applied regarding whatever incredulous idea or unbelievable outcome we might imagine, our most impossible dreams can actually materialize (whether they be good or bad) despite the misgivings and strong objections anyone might voice towards them.

In Frances Hodgson Burnett's enduring classic *The Secret Garden*, the author makes the simple yet keen observation about how many other people often react to our most unique and creative thoughts and beliefs—as those thoughts and beliefs gradually develop into both full-fledged, materialized accomplishments and manifestations:

> At first people refuse to believe that a strange new thing can be done, then they begin to hope it can be done, then they see it can be done—then it is done and all the world wonders why it was not done centuries ago. One of the new things people began to find out in the last century was that thoughts—just mere thoughts—are as powerful as electric batteries—as good for one as sunlight is, or as bad for one as poison.[32]

---

[32] According to *Wikipedia*, Frances Hodgson Burnett (1849–1924) was:

> …an Anglo-American novelist and playwright. She is best known for the three children's novels *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (published in 1885–1886), *A Little Princess* (1905), and *The Secret Garden* (1911).

It is well to reiterate once again that final phrase from *The Secret Garden* segment mentioned above. Burnett reflects upon the dualistic nature of thought when she states:

> …thoughts—just mere thoughts—are as powerful as electric batteries—as good for one as sunlight is, or as bad for one as poison.

Thoughts coming into our mental focus, which we begin to ponder repeatedly, frequently induce emotional responses. And multiple thoughts that we cluster together create ideas. When our thoughts and ideas are rehearsed with emotions, oftentimes intentions are born. (Intentions are nothing more than thoughts and ideas to which we have given a personalized purpose or specific direction.)

As we repeatedly consider our intentions while fertilizing them with unceasing applications of additional thought and emotion, our beliefs and subsequent actions can result. Actions can be seen as a state of consciously or unconsciously practicing thought in (and into) a more manifest and physical condition. After we persist in responding to these *basic mechanisms stemming from thought* with even more of the same, such practiced or exercised responses create further offshoots.

Throughout the course of this work, I will frequently mention only some of the *basic mechanisms stemming from thought*. To list all of them over and over again would prove to be cumbersome at best and also might impede the general continuity and flow of the text. So, as we proceed through the book, please bear in mind that there are several supplementary mechanisms that are also important to consider each time that I cite any partial listing.

Although I refer here to the *basic mechanisms stemming from thought*, the complete term I initially devised for such components of material manifestation is:

The essential, integral mechanisms and constructs stemming from thought…

Or for the sake of being more straightforward, we can refer to them simply as *thought extensions*.

More of these so-called thought extensions include **additional thoughts** (a succession of thoughts generated from an initial thought), **convictions** (a combining of intentions with beliefs to produce principles with a strong intended purpose or focus), and a host of internal perceptions such as **inner speech** (or **inner voices**) and **inner vision** (or **mental images**

She is obviously indicating how potentially splendid or lethal any thought can be in actuality. Nevertheless, the entirety of her story expresses yet another, diametrically different sentiment as well.

She introduces two very spoiled children (emotionally damaged, love-starved, and exceedingly lonely) who meet in the oddest of circumstances, only to discover a gradual way out of their seemingly fated existence—an existence which has otherwise been leading them into further anger, futility, and despair. And the means by which they can free themselves from this unhappiness turns out to be how simply changing their own thoughts, beliefs, and subsequent actions can also change their lives. They both discover how hope and kindness (founded on an ever-residing love) can ultimately dissolve all of the dichotomous struggles consuming them and transform each of their unsettled and unsettling circumstances into a truly miraculous and unifying outcome of wonder made manifest.

and **visualizations**). With these mechanisms we often reinforce our thoughts and other basic thought extensions—**ideas**, **emotions**, **intentions**, **beliefs,** and **actions**—through internalized discussions, debates, and deliberations. Others may refer to some or all such functions in a rather simplistic and generalized manner as imagination or hallucination. (We will discuss an appropriate distinction between thought extensions, imagination, and hallucinations in later chapters.)

Finally, there are **spoken words**, **written words,** and **words that are sung or intoned**. In each case, these thought extensions carry outward our thoughts—and subsequent componential derivatives of thought—into the material realm.

Any functions resembling the aforementioned mechanisms simply are new branches materializing out of previously generated thought seeds. Most importantly, it is important to remember that everything we repeat is purely the practiced sowing, nursing, and nurturing of either divine attributes or weeds.

Not only does this process affect us while occurring in each aspect of our own individual lives, but it ultimately affects everyone and everything by directly (or indirectly) manifesting in all that exists. Even as we include others in joint, interactive practices with (or without) the implementation of the *Four Cs*, they will also begin to reinforce their own thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions (and all other thought extensions) while reacting to and/or interacting with ours. Until we become totally proficient practicing these things in a state of complete balance—promoting an ever-increasing, awareness of all things being connected through divine love—then each of our outcomes will persist solely as the weeds of duality.

Consequently, how must divine love be practiced so as to realize a constant state of balance in all that we experience? To allow this impalpable symmetry to occur in us, first it is important to be capable of identifying and understanding the insidious weeds of ego,[33] attachment, illusion, and their various dualistic opposites. It is also imperative to comprehend and ultimately practice the divine attributes that transcend and dissolve these dualities. But before proceeding with an explanation of such notions, it would first be useful to consider the following stories.[34]

---

[33] In Buddhism, *ego* is the delusory state whereby we completely preoccupy ourselves with illusions of the seen world, including our separate self, while reacting to that world as if it were the only reality. Ego also entraps us in duality, preventing awareness of balance, oneness, and divine love.

[34] Although further discussions of these ideas can be found throughout the rest of the book, a more detailed description of how to practice cultivating divine attributes is located in the appendix.

III.

Voices and whispers from our truer nature...

Hiking in the White Mountains of New Hampshire has been one of the great passions of my life for more than fifty years. It has provided countless forms of recreation. This includes exhilarating climbs up diverse trails; relaxing at an endless variety of scenic summits with breathtaking vistas in every direction; refreshing dips in dozens of cold, mountain pools beneath idyllic waterfalls, chutes, and cascades; and close encounters with hundreds of moose, bears, a solitary cougar, lynxes, wolves, coyotes, beavers, wild turkeys, snowshoe hares, a family of ermine, bald eagles, golden eagles, hawks, falcons, white herons, a great white egret, great blue herons, and one oddly attractive fisher cat—along with many other species in the wild.

Aside from being a wonderful haven where endless hours of blissful repose would be spent, these mountains quickly became much more to me. They were a rich source of awe, inspiration, and healing. I have composed dozens of musical works and have written hundreds of poems while in the wilderness. Additionally, thousands of photographs were taken of sunsets, mountains, water views, rock formations, trees, flowers, and diverse forest life.

From years of pursuing the exhilarating and arduous exercise of hiking in clear mountain air, I overcame a wide assortment of afflictions and illnesses. Profound insights, precognitive visions, and mystical visitations readily occurred to me during my treks in the wild. A great number of these perceptions catalyzed prevailing, immediate, and miraculous transformations in both my overall health and material wellbeing.

As I witnessed thunderous torrents rushing through ravines (or plummeting down precipitous and abysmal corridors of bedrock, moss, and ledge), the rumble of those rivers literally laughed with me and sang verses in human tongues. From such naiad choruses I could transcribe pages of poetry to paper almost instantly, as though my pen-in-hand merely were an instrument through which automatic writings might pass.

In June 1979, one particular poem presented itself to me in this fashion. Before our current-day warming trend began dispelling virtually every trace of winter earlier and earlier each year, the White Mountains used to have significant snow and ice cover throughout much

of the spring season. Many trails still would be blanketed in white during late May and early June—oftentimes, even at lower elevations. The weather nevertheless could be simultaneously warm in the extreme, and it therefore wasn't an unusual sight to see the occasional hiker snowshoeing (or cross-country skiing) while simply wearing shorts and a T-shirt or even remaining bare-chested.

Just after the noon hour had passed on an unseasonably hot day in the seventies, I was trudging beside a well-loved mountain brook in Franconia Notch. For nearly a half-mile stretch, that moderately steep waterway had transformed into an arctic avalanche of frosted and fluid thaw. A long-dormant ice-bed indeed had awakened into cascading, landlocked tidal waves of oceanic proportions.

As I stood near the bottom of this vastly augmented rush, there was nothing else that my senses could perceive other than the pervasive and uncontainable magnitude of such a distinct and overwhelming spectacle. The once-narrow riverbed, its playful waters, the granite slides, and dozens of refreshing pools had now vanished altogether, as this once-annual stampede of unrelenting turbulence trampled all of these normally prevalent features underfoot.[35]

In calmer seasons anyone normally could marvel at the smoothness of multi-colored, mosaic-like slides and traverse alongside the pristine water's edge. During those gentler occasions, beautifully carved, bowl-shaped pools that were only a few feet in diameter would briefly detain these whimsical waters. Then, as the restless flows were released from their fleeting captivity, they continued to swirl, spin, and tumble about—forever dancing a descent towards lower elevations nearby.

All the same, a wintry landscape now persevered through the sultry weather of that special afternoon in June. As riotous rushes came rocketing into several of those well-shapen granite bowls residing there, the untamed floods catapulted aloft with explosive intensity. Many of them were even captured in a momentary embrace with the outstretched, lower branches of grand old hemlocks and spruce—suspended twenty to thirty feet overhead.

---

[35] I mention here that this scene was a *once-annual* event. Before the 1990s, these phenomenal occurrences took place over the course of several days each year. Granted, the entirety of each thaw usually took many weeks. Occasionally, the thawing process could occur over a period of months, especially if it were interrupted by numerous, spring snowstorms. But peak thaws like the one described above demonstrated a far-greater intensity than at any other time and often might be witnessed solely on a single afternoon.

In more recent years, these thawing events have become increasingly less dramatic. This is due to the overall trend of warmer winters and less snow. Nevertheless, there are still many wonderful moments to experience along these waterways. However, they come much earlier in the season now, and the scale of their intensity often tends to be considerably less than in years past.

Although I yearned to proceed further up the trail, knowing full well that there would be many other wonders to witness on that day, I couldn't move. My entire being was incapable of withdrawing. It were as though this corporeal structure of mine had been frozen fast to the icepack beneath my feet. I stood transfixed while witnessing those ferocious fountains flying sky-high.

The air was dense with their elusive vapors. Fantastical and dreamlike, these mysterious and mystifying mists emanated from multiple geysers, frenetically overpowering the entire landscape. Such formidable founts they were and into the atmosphere they continually blasted outward and upward. Dispelling their cyclonic might omnidirectionally (merely a dozen yards ahead of where I stood spellbound), frigid and explosive moisture minced every molecule of exposed skin that enveloped my stunned inner countenance. Although the initial contact with such rawness was bitter, biting, and wet, it nonetheless gave me pause from the ever-intensifying heat of that torrid afternoon.

Unexpectedly, upon these swiftly descending white waters and within the audible roar of their ubiquitous spray, I began to distinguish outbursts of immense, incontestable laughter. This joviality seemed to sail upon the surging waves before me while penetrating my senses from all sides. Its mirthful eruptions then transformed into song, and ecstatic voices began to resonate these lyrics in a glorious melody:

Sing to me of waters, you waters!
Of spring's great mountain floods,
Conduct symphonic dances down
Tumultuous whirlpool's rush.

Chant to me love's mysteries
In esoteric tongues,
Cascades unleash life's prophesies
Through wild roars of polyphony.

The forest trees hear your song now
As messenger birds chirp utterances to the wind.
Great boulders whisper in deep ravines,
Echoing: "Rebirth, Rebirth, Rebirth".

Blooming buds open to your tuneful breath—
Antiphonal calls to procreate—
Your song dwells within the deepest womb
And provokes the living spirit to action there.

The seed now planted is your song,
The world awakens in harmony.
Your voice directs a predestined star
To bless the cosmic nativity.

Your cry is even warmer now
From sunlight's stronger rays of heat,
And winter snows melt back to you—
Alive again in your foaming pools.

So sing great rivers of the world
A blessing of abundance for all the earth.
O perennial spring waters sing to me
The incessant, streaming song of grace.[36]

As I listened to this jubilant musical discourse rise above the river's thunder, a profound and insistent yearning took hold without warning:

I must put these words to paper now!

The moment this idea struck me, I instantly grabbed my backpack, threw it down, emptied it over the melting snow, and began scrounging furiously for something on which to transcribe all that was being chanted upon the ether.

However, neither pen nor paper was to be had. Solemnly standing amid such an untamed yet inviolable stirring, I felt powerless to preserve its utterances. Indeed, I surmised that almost certainly those ephemeral words would evaporate out of existence momentarily.

While lamenting this likelihood, it suddenly became clear to me what should be done. I made an immediate about-face and dashed off feverishly to my car. Hoping beyond all hopes

[36] Several years after having written down this poem initially, I decided to change the fourth line in the final stanza. Otherwise, the rest of the piece remains unedited to this day. The version offered here includes that one revision.

that I would find the needed writing materials there, I sprinted away from the river towards this otherwise-unintended destination. But the further I ran, the more those spirit-like singers fell away into the ever-increasing distances. By the time I would finally reach the car, might those voices vanish altogether and their joyful lyrics be lost forever?

This question haunted me repeatedly without cessation. Nevertheless, the river chorus interrupted my silent trepidations by augmenting its song through a succession of massive, grand crescendos. While still increasing in volume, the cryptic music that was overflowing upon my being gradually began to change into two separate choirs.

Emanating from the animated waters I was leaving behind, those river voices persisted in singing their poetical words while a new, antiphonal section of singers (emerging suddenly in front of me) chanted high above the other group with an alternate set of lyrics spouting forth as an enduring stream of urgent commands:

Think the first line! Speak the first line! Remember the first line!...

Even after spending a quarter-hour amid this euphonious din, I almost completely forgot the beginning phrase nonetheless. Then those elemental songsters started echoing the opening line once more. They cried out exultantly:

Sing to me of waters, you waters!

While reminding me of the lyrics in this fashion, I too began to chant these words over and over again.

As I drew near to the parking lot, the river's uproarious intensity had faded from my hearing—with expanses ever widening between us. And so too, the voices of those invisible singers of songs had been diminished.

When I finally unlocked the car door and began searching glove box, trunk, and all other storage compartments, the sounds from any remaining river vocalizations disappeared completely. The only voice enduring now was that of my own. I continued chanting the prescribed *mantra* unassisted, solely to keep a seed of the poem alive within me. Nevertheless, I despaired because pen and paper were not to be found anywhere.

Just when I was about to give up searching altogether, my left foot suddenly lost traction, slipped beneath one of the car seats, and bumped up against something solid. Much to my delight it was a notebook. Actually, it happened to be a long-lost ledger in which I used to

record my annual car expenses. Not only were there still several empty pages therein, but a pen also had been tucked away between the sheets; and it continued to be in working order.

Without delay, I ripped out a few of those remaining blank pages, stuffed pen and paper into my pocket, and swiftly took flight back towards the river. All the while, I continued to repeat those initial sentiments imploringly:

Sing to me of waters, you waters!

At the moment when my own chase-worn body came upon those wild fountains once more, their sprite-like voices blissfully began singing the entirety of that springtime evocation for the last time. I scribbled down each word as fast as I could onto the torn-out sheets from my old and tattered tax ledger.

In this manner, the lyrics had been written down completely in less than five minutes. As I contemplated what to name the piece, a solitary voice spoke to me softly:

April's Benediction.

At first, I found the title bewildering and questioned why it referred to a time of year that happened to be considerably earlier than it actually was at the present moment. After all, June already had begun and summer was about to unfold.

Then, a reason for this became apparent. To most of us living in the world's northern temperate zone (except at higher elevations perhaps, and deep within the mountains) a scene of ice, melting snow, and roaring rapids might not seem synonymous with June. Rather, this is the month of burgeoning blossoms and soft, gentle rains; and it is in April when massive snowmelts, crashing ice, and surging floods would appear to be more likely to preside over any rugged landscape.

While I rushed back to the water's edge, repeatedly intoning the initial line of the poem, I caught myself mulling over the significance of these words. Why would waters be asking themselves to sing to themselves about themselves? This mysterious phrase captivated me thoroughly, even as my mind suddenly transported me high upon a faraway peak. There, my legs hung lightly over the bank of a restful pool where a fountain gently rose up from its center.

These quiet waters obviously appeared to be nothing like the passionate outpourings towards which I happened to be racing at the time. Instead, they were clear and calming, a diametric alternative to the electrifying world in which I found myself currently. In fact, it was

as though I were a poet from ancient times making the solemn ascent up Mount Helicon. While approaching the summit, destiny would guide my lips to touch those blessed waters of the Hippocrene and sip its sacred nectar into the core of my being.[37] I then could invoke the muses to inspire me. In turn, they would reveal the meaning of those puzzling words that presently were engulfing my senses:

Sing to me of waters, you waters.

In early mystical teachings, the blood of all living things was thought to be the carrier of spirit, the vessel of the soul, the container of life's energy, and even a temple for sheltering the eternal essence of everything. Yet, it was often referred to merely as water. Considering that this seemingly simple substance comprises over ninety percent of blood's entirety, it perhaps is not as unreasonable an analogy as it first might seem.

After all, when the body is completely drained of blood, there is obviously no more water to carry anything—nourishment nor spirit. This means death for the body and a departure for all the intangible elements of life found within it. Equally, when any living creature is seriously deprived of just plain water, the blood too must eventually lose its essential liquescence. Either of these conditions will force that body to perish and incite the soul to take flight.

Throughout pantheistic writings, the elusive spirit of life dwelling upon the earth was often symbolized by oceans, rivers, and cascades brimming with water. When these sacred fluids dried up from draught or froze in the frigid depths of winter, each affected portion of spirit was deemed to be merely absent or asleep.

So, as we now return our attention back to the ecstatic, water-bound choristers and their glorious voices—as those eternal naiads continued to sing resonantly above the many rumblings of mountain streams in springtime—we can also resituate ourselves together in that time and place where I happened to be pondering each liquid intonement crying out to me so brilliantly.

It was then that came the proverbial flash of recognition. I finally understood this song to be nothing more than a festive entreaty of ultimate rebirth. Those jubilant voices were bidding all divine spirit, found in earthly waters and in each molecule of mortal blood, to arouse and awaken. In this seasonal celebration of resurrection, they sang to the waters of infinite

[37] According to *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary*, the Hippocrene was:

> …a fountain on Mount Helicon sacred to the Muses and believed to be the source of poetic inspiration.

Helicon is a mountain in east-central Greece.

spirit and love. They cried out to every atom of moisture found in the heavens above us, uniting the river floods about us, and even upon those circulating, fragile fluids within our own mortality's frame.[38]

Aside from these mesmerizing moments when the blessed unseen recited poetry to me, on many other occasions I also found myself dialoguing with angels. The shimmering shapes of saints summoned me in starlight, in moonlight, in daylight, and in twilight. For this domain of the natural had become my church and my sanctuary, veritably an outer reflection of the temple within. It was and continues to be a living portal to the vast cathedral of my heart.

There may be those who question all of this by suggesting that these experiences merely were hallucinated. Some might even label them as psychotic episodes. Yet the majority of those happenings (out of hundreds) effected dramatic and sometimes even lasting changes. They regularly benefited my physical health, artistic creativity, finances, personal relationships, and my entire life.

Frequently, I was made aware of others in considerable need. But without such occurrences, I never would have known to assist them. So if these were just symptoms of psychosis or some sort of mountain madness, then indeed I am grateful for a madness that has served me well.

[38] While first transcribing "April's Benediction" by the river's edge, this poem called out to me as if invoking the entire world to come alive again. But soon thereafter, these lyrical verses suitably became the formal invocation to a large literary work as well. I selected them to be the first poem in a triple trilogy of almost three hundred pieces. Collectively, they were entitled: *Songs for the Beloved Soul*.

During the mid-1980s, I also used the words from "April's Benediction" as lyrics for a large, choral piece by the same name. This musical composition was scored for two antiphonal choirs, two pianos, tympani, and bells. Unfortunately, both my musical opus and nearly the entire poetic trilogy were lost in the flood of 2007 as was depicted earlier in the Preface.

IV.

Braving beyond crisis...

At the beginning of June 2007, I had the sudden and unexpected opportunity to hike in the mountains almost on a daily basis. Until the final week of October of the same year, I managed to venture on a series of day hikes that totaled a distance of six hundred thirty miles. Actually, I planned to hike eight hundred miles before any heavy snowfall accumulated. However, my aspirations never were met. While deep within the Pemigewasset Wilderness on the Sunday before Halloween, a serious accident had befallen me[39] nearly eleven miles from the nearest road.[40]

I decided to venture up to Bondcliff and Mount Bond that day, an ascent I hadn't made since the early 1980s. All hikers I have ever met who knew this area unanimously agreed that the landscape here is utterly unique. Many believe the exceptional beauty of this vicinity is unsurpassed anywhere in the White Mountains. With numerous views that are among the most astounding in eastern North America, it always has been a great source of inspiration and peace for me. Normally, the cost of this serenity is an extensive and strenuous climb into one of the remotest regions in the Northeast. But that day I would pay even a greater price.

The weather was unseasonably wet for autumn in New Hampshire, and it poured torrentially throughout the night before I left for *the Bonds*.[41] When I awoke about six-thirty that morning, a cold mountain rain had subsided—leaving the air fresh, crisp, and clear. I was eager to embark on the day's adventure so I quickly loaded my pack and set foot onto the trail just before seven.

---

[39] The reason for my being able to hike day after day (as mentioned in the Preface) was that I had been driven into a period of homelessness lasting for several months. During the entire summer and fall of that year, I slept in the back of my car and hiked daily until breaking my ankle far from any roadway or village. Obviously, this accident was the reason for ending those particular hiking adventures abruptly and prematurely.

[40] The twenty-fourth edition of the Appalachian Mountain Club's *White Mountain Guide* states that the trail to Bondcliff is nine miles from the nearest road. However, at the time of this hiking episode, the trail signs indicated the trip to be two miles longer. These types of discrepancies occur occasionally after portions of certain trails have been rerouted. Sometimes, alternate pathways are created when the original tracks have endured too much traffic, thereby damaging or threatening certain species of plant life. Another reason for redirecting hikers is due to erosion and other potentially hazardous conditions, making the trail impassable, or simply too dangerous for the average hiker to navigate safely.

[41] This term often is used when referring both to Bondcliff and the summit of Mount Bond simultaneously.

There were countless pockets of mist and vapor suspended over the forest floor. They seemed to float magically (weightless above moss, fern, rock, and clay), as if these sparkling, silvery-veiled vessels were sailing on an imperceptible sea of enchantment. Because of the heavy precipitation earlier, I could hear a nearby river cry out like quiet thunder. But from time to time, the distance between path and stream would shorten, so that forest-flood's vibrant voice might rise even greater in a massive upsurge of seismic singing.

The first three miles was a simple, pleasant walk on Lincoln Woods Trail close to the Pemigewasset River. Straight and flat, this way into the wilderness followed an abandoned railroad bed, one of many that were used to transport lumber during the early part of the twentieth century.

At the end of this section, the path came down to a second stream. Here I crossed the wide and rocky Franconia Brook on a foot-bridge. However, it always was my custom to pause for a few moments at the center of this bridge before proceeding to Bondcliff or to several other destinations I visited more frequently. First I would turn to face an oncoming gush rushing towards me, absorbing sight and sound of the quickening flow as it emptied its turbulent joy underfoot. Then I would reverse the direction of my gaze to observe the water's retreat downstream. It hurried headlong towards a small secluded isle, encircling the sleepy refuge with relentless outbursts of laughing, leaping, liquid noise.

After being replenished by these splendorous sights, I moved on across the remainder of the bridge and entered the rough country to follow the more untouched Wilderness Trail for another mile and a half. After that, I began the rigorous rise up Bondcliff Trail to the amazing outlooks at Bondcliff. With enormous anticipation, I was nearing this most cherished of destinations but never quite reached the top. During the arduous approach to the cliffs, it was necessary to scramble across numerous rock faces. Because of heavy rainfall earlier, portions of the smooth surface over which I was compelled to traverse had become slick as ice. This made the passage painfully slow and tedious.

Suddenly my thoughts started to wander. A multitude of challenges and obstacles facing me at the time unexpectedly began flooding my thoughts, and I lost all concentration concerning the precarious task at hand. Consequently, the exact moment when I forgot to focus on my feet crossing such a slippery slope was the same moment when both of them flew out from under me. Normally, I recover well when I fall, relaxing fully while tumbling to the ground. However, this time it was to no advantage. When my body crashed onto the downward-slanting,

slimy slab beneath me, it continued to accelerate—sliding further upon this precarious descent.

But as I eventually began to steady myself and reestablish a standing position, my right foot surprisingly became wedged in a tight crevice within an otherwise-smooth and solid rock surface. My other foot (still being free) lost all traction quickly thereafter and immediately took flight once more. The rest of my body whipped entirely around the leg locked into the ledge. Giving way to the enormous force of the turn, my right ankle broke almost entirely with one nauseating, earsplitting crack.

Immediately, I collapsed earthbound yet again, crying out an appropriate expletive while making my agonizing fall to the ground. Despite total distress after being entirely flattened, I also realized that I was still completely caught in the rock.

All at once, I regained some presence of mind and was able to release my distended foot from the clutches of stone and ledge. During the next few seconds, my ankle swelled to more than four times its normal size. My foot also bulged so severely that I thought it would explode. Even while in this unforeseen, elephantine condition, it flopped away from my ankle hideously and dangled a full ninety degrees lower than when functioning in its usual position.

After examining my injury, I realized that no longer could I utilize my right leg for walking. Having considered the sun's position in the sky, and estimating the time to be approximately one o'clock that Sunday afternoon, I knew it was unlikely for any hikers to be still this deep in the wilderness. A rescue didn't seem plausible, so I began planning how I would make the perilous, one-legged journey back to the parking lot—roughly eleven miles away.

The temperature was diving. Winds were accelerating. Light flurries of snow began swirling through the air; and any remnants of warmth from increasingly elusive sunbeams were faltering and fading fast. To find a walking stick seemed to be essential at this point. However, I was near the timberline amid small, scrubby fir trees, those with no long or straight branches that would be suitable for the task. All sticks at this altitude were either too short, unstable, bent, rough, or rotten to be of any use. For countless minutes I scanned the landscape, hoping I would discover something that might suffice. Regrettably, I found nothing.

Nevertheless, there were other dynamics at work here. Almost daily, for the past several months I hiked nearly six hundred thirty miles and spent most of my walking time in deep meditation and prayer. It was part of my purpose for these mountain quests and certainly an indispensable practice for my life. Without this conscious preparation, I am certain that the ultimate outcome—corresponding to all my choices made throughout this day's journey—would

have been considerably less auspicious than that which actually took place.

What occurred next might seem like happenstance or a fluke of good fortune. But to consider it as only a *coincidence* would be illogical. Throughout the years, this distinct brand of *luck* has manifested too frequently to have transpired simply by chance. On several occasions my life had been saved, and twice the lives of others had also been saved by these benevolent, so-called twists of fate.

At moments of crisis, a peculiar sensation often occurred to me. It was as though an invisible pair of highly magnetized hands[42] were placed above my ears. In this particular instance, they gently coaxed my head to turn away from the trail and off into the rough terrain surrounding me. Almost instantly, my eyes focused on a particular rock located more than sixty feet away from where I was sitting. The persuasively electrical, unseen grasp upon me compelled my gaze to cross over granite rubble and rotting roots—and finally to land upon a singular whittled walking stick left behind in the middle of nowhere.

Before attempting a tenuous crawl to claim this prize, it would have been highly beneficial to build a splint for supporting my ankle. I kept cord, cardboard, adhesive tape, wooden rulers, and other supplies in my pack for such emergencies. However, it was impossible for me to bend down and reach the injury without causing severe trembling and dizziness. Neither did I have enough control or leverage to position my foot properly. There was little likelihood that I would be able to manage this task successfully without causing further damage and probably would have passed out from the excruciating pain. Regardless, my makeshift tools were not ideal for this specific injury; and even though there was nothing other than a hiking shoe to brace or protect foot and ankle, I decided halfheartedly to proceed ahead without a splint.

The next several minutes seemed like hours. As I inched towards the wooden pole amid an endless array of boulders and brushwood, it was essential to keep my injured leg raised high. The situation might have easily deteriorated into something far more precarious, and it certainly would have been the case if the mangled appendage hanging precariously below my right knee bumped into any of the countless stone slabs cropping up all around me.

Yet, after having dragged myself past each of those obstacles, I finally was able to reach

[42] Throughout my life there were innumerable occasions when this type of phenomenon occurred. Oftentimes, there were only sensations of magnetized hands being placed on my person; but countless other times, I actually could see translucent hands touching my body. In every case, they directed me to remarkable discoveries or kept me out of harm's way. In countless cases they guided me away from situations that certainly could have brought about my death. If each of these circumstances were not the direct cause of or had some immediate relationship to their exceptional, physical outcomes, I would have concluded that they were simply hallucinations.

that most urgent of objectives. My *mysterious cane*—after which I had been crawling towards for countless minutes—had inexplicably been propped upright much further away from the trail than what might ordinarily seem to make sense, especially within such a remote and untouched area. After all, why would anyone leave the trodden path to wind up on a rough rockpile that neither had much scenic value nor displayed any of the necessary attributes to pose as a reasonable resting spot for weary hikers? Aside from these considerations, a few other questions suddenly occurred to me:

Who would part with such a fine stick?
Was it simply forgotten or were there other, more cryptic reasons for its being left behind in such a peculiar spot?
Or could someone have actually foreseen my great need and intentionally put it in a place where I would eventually come to find it?

Regardless of all the philosophizing, it soon became obvious that my priority should be to head down the mountain at once. Fortunately, the walking stick would allow me to do just that. Navigating this steep trail for miles would have been an impossibility without it. What is more, someone had even peeled off every bit of bark and shaved away its rough edges so the surface was entirely smooth and comfortable to grip. My newfound staff was straight, sturdy, and had an ideal weight. It was perfect for the task at hand.

Considering the rugged terrain and low frequency of hikers at that time of year, odds for discovering such an ideal crutch so close to where my mishap actually occurred had to be greater than winning a lottery jackpot! How grateful I felt when first grabbing onto this beautiful cane. Once I was able to stand upright again, it became apparent that it was the perfect length for me, fitting securely and comfortably under my arm.

Taking some time to steady myself (no longer being in a horizontal position), I surveyed the vast expanse before me. The snow had subsided for the time being, and I could feel faint rays of heat from the sun upon my face. Even though I didn't quite reach Bondcliff, the views from this vantage were staggering nonetheless.

My mood sobered straight away when I began to surmise the bewildering challenge facing me. Minutes earlier, the trail falling quickly before me was of no more consequence than the exhilarating descent that it usually represented. However, now burdened with an unforeseen disability, the slope ahead suddenly seemed sheer, treacherous, and even deadly.

Without any warning, my thoughts began to race. Dozens of further questions flooded my mind, each one screaming out to be heard over all the rest:

How long will it take to drag myself out of here?
How much colder will it get tonight?
Will it freeze?
Will there be more snow?
How deep will it get?
How fast should I walk?
Shall I step forward or sideways?
Should I yell for help?
Will someone save me?
How much strength do I have left?
Will I fall another time?
Will I live through this?
How much time do I have left?
Will I die?
I must hurry, hurry, hurry…

All at once, I entered a most dangerous state. I was in absolute panic. I felt an instant urge to dash down the trail as quickly as possible. Without thinking, I began to step off the ledge with my good foot and didn't remember that the other one was swinging below its normal position. So when the rest of my body began to follow my strong leg downward to the lower step, my injured foot was jolted forcibly against the surface of the upper rock.

As soon as it made contact with the ledge, an exquisite pain devoured me. I shrieked and fell with full impact on the injured ankle, instantly extending the fracture further up my leg. The noise of this crack was even more horrific than the first. Now I was in total shock. I sobbed. I gagged. I vomited. My entire body quivered uncontrollably.

Yet only a short time passed before a persistent voice filled my ears. It saturated all space surrounding me. In benign but forceful tones, a resounding command echoed:

STOP THIS NOW!!!

After seizing my attention, it continued:

You will soothe yourself, breathe fully, and meditate until serenity overtakes you. Then carefully, you will get up and get out of this, just as you have always done. You will pay attention to both feet at all times. Slowly, you will secure one step after another, AND IT WILL TAKE AS LONG AS IT TAKES!

So I began to breathe deeply and the pain subsided. My fears immediately collapsed into calm. An immense white light enveloped my being and inundated the atmosphere all round. Neither death nor darkness could conquer me then, for profound peace came and consumed me.

Clarity reclaimed my thoughts and my wits also returned. I re-examined the injury and realized the swelling had increased considerably. Even my knee now had ballooned in size. It came to mind that I kept a beneficial homeopathic treatment containing *arnica*[43] in my pack. So I spent the next several minutes gently rubbing the herbal cream into my ankle and lower leg. This preparation has exceptional properties that promote healing by reducing swelling and pain.

Because I found that it was still difficult for me to bend over to reach the ankle, I carefully used one of my rulers to apply some cream. Then I wrapped the other ruler with a thin, soft cloth and utilized it to lightly massage the entire ankle and leg. As soon as my skin began to absorb the cream, the arnica truly became a soothing balm. It removed a considerable amount of internal heat caused by inflammation, and within minutes the severe swelling subsided noticeably. If it were not for my applying arnica several times during my prolonged return down Bondcliff Trail, I doubt that I would have been able to walk as far as I did.

After tending to the injury, I knew it was time to begin the descent. I reloaded my pack, slowly lifted myself up with the walking stick, checked my balance, and carefully started to move once more. This time, I vigilantly focused my attention on every step I made and continued this process throughout the remainder of the day. Whenever my thoughts wandered or raced, I would remember to breathe deeply and command my attention back to observing

[43] For many years, I always carried arnica in my pack while on the trail. It provided me with enormous relief from headaches, neck strain and spasms, bruises on the arms and legs, and soreness or stiffness in any part of the body. Whenever I met other hikers who had difficulty walking (having strained themselves on some of the more challenging trails), I would suggest that they might benefit from trying this remedy. Often I encountered those who were limping seriously, and others who I met could not walk at all. In each case, arnica reduced their spasms, pain, and stiffness quickly and dramatically. Subsequently, every one of them resumed walking reasonably well after applying the cream. Following my mishap below Bondcliff, the orthopedic surgeon (who began caring for me the next day) was impressed by arnica's therapeutic abilities. I used it several times a day after surgery and was discharged from the doctor's care in a fraction of the time anticipated.

each footstep. By upholding this routine, my body and mind remained still—thereby averting any more mishaps.

Ordinarily, I could hike a downhill-mile in twelve to thirty-five minutes[44] depending on the bulk and heaviness of the load I was packing and the steepness, roughness, and instability of the track. In this instance, even while hauling relatively light weight on my back, it took nearly three hours to manage just over a mile. The world around me became invisible as I continued to concentrate exclusively on the steps ahead of me. Coaxing myself to make the present challenge merely another form of meditation, I persisted in breathing slowly and deeply. Throughout my passage, I continued to hear the voice that shook me out of the earlier panic. It now spoke quietly and encouragingly.

From an objective perspective, it would have been unreasonable to expect anyone to discover me so late in the afternoon, especially at the close of this chilly, autumn weekend. I nevertheless was compelled to inquire of my guiding voice whether I might actually meet someone on the trail that day. In a persuasive yet mild response, I heard the words:

Yes, you will be found.

Several times I asked this question, partly doubting the answer. Each time came the same, patient reply. Then it struck me that I should ask: *when*. As soon as I posed the query, an answer was immediate:

He is coming now.

Not even a minute had passed when I heard broken rock crunching under heavy footsteps, the sound of a backpacker approaching from the path above. As a sturdy fellow rounded the corner, he spotted me and called out in friendly greeting. After explaining my situation to him, he offered to accompany me. Undeniably I was grateful for his offer, but we both realized that this course of action would be highly impractical. I was already struggling to maintain a painfully slow pace, one that continued to protract minute by minute. If a dying snail challenged me to a race at that moment, I certainly would have lost.

It was nearing four-thirty p.m. and soon the impending darkness of dusk would further impede my ability to move effectively and safely. So we both agreed that he should run ahead

[44] If I decided to jog or sprint, a downhill mile obviously would take even less time.

while I continued to drag myself along as best I could. Before setting off down the trail, he promised that he would return after calling for help.

With immense regret I said farewell to the only person I met that afternoon. Watching him vanish quickly below me, I surmised even if he were able to contact the rescue team, it wasn't likely for him to reappear later on. After all, he had been hiking seriously the entire weekend. Following his pending return to the parking lot, and if he actually was able to come back for me, it would require him to manage another round-trip to and from my position on the mountain. This meant he must add at least another twenty miles to an already long and grueling trudge that weekend in the wilds.

As the sound of his footsteps faded away down the steep slope, waves of a spectral solitude swallowed me whole. I hadn't experienced such emptiness prior to that moment. While my body began submitting to a fit of despair, I reminded myself incessantly to continue meditating—to focus on what I was doing and where I was going. Instantly, this yoke of desolation dissolved. Its withdrawal was more sudden than its inception. Without warning, I was drawn back to my surroundings. The intense beauty of the forest stimulated my senses. Sights and sounds and smells swept me into fresh stillness and wonder. Complete calm was restored to my soul.

For a brief time, I deliberated whether it would be wiser to stay where I was and wait for help to arrive. Although the idea of not having to walk any longer had its allure, it was crucial to consider there may be no one coming to assist me that night. Perhaps my new-found friend wouldn't be able to make contact with the appropriate rescue service. He might have failed to reach the trailhead himself. There were a dozen reasons why it was vital for me to persist as long as I had any strength remaining. Consequently, I picked myself up and stumbled slowly forward.

While I continued to hobble with increasing difficulty, an unanticipated image began to dominate my mind. I envisioned that I now had two walking sticks. This surprising impression gave birth to an almost obsessive notion—that I must find another pole to employ as an additional prop. I could use both of them as crutches and side-step my way down the slope with greater swiftness, ease, and control.

Even though I was at a much lower altitude than where the accident took place, prospects for finding a suitable stick in these woods were no more likely. Nevertheless, I began to examine everything around me though nothing seemed promising. For countless minutes I searched

without success while continuing to limp ahead. Then I halted all movement brusquely and stared into oblivion, not knowing what else to do.

Once again, those unseen, magnetized hands were placed tenderly upon my brow. They softly swayed me to face downward towards the earth, and then slightly to my left. For the first time, I noticed the end of a smooth branch hidden in thick undergrowth. If I hadn't stopped in that exact place, it would have remained invisible to me. Large rocks and stumps surrounded it on both sides, making it impossible to view from any other location on the trail.

With diligence, I shifted my stance in order to move more readily into the brush. Stooping over, while uncovering this hidden gift, I realized that it was no ordinary stick. As before, those vibrant, guiding hands led me to another perfect cane. Although it wasn't whittled as my first one was, the bark had peeled away naturally. Its length was shorter than that of the other stick, so now I had an ideal pair of crutches for assisting me in side-stepping down the steep path. Continuing to face into the woods and away from the trail, I positioned my shorter crutch under the arm that was closest to high ground in the path. Then I propped the longer stick under the opposite arm—nearest to the ground already lowering beneath me.

Immediately, I began to side-step downhill with comparative ease. Advancing more readily, with an assuredness I hadn't known since these difficulties began, I now could manage a pace that was significantly faster than all others I attempted after injuring myself. It still was relatively slow and I was obliged to remain mindful every step of the way. Despite this, the new stride liberated me. It felt as though I were finally moving again.

While daylight continued to dissolve and the grey of twilight began to settle over the forest, an acute awareness surfaced above all else that I was thinking. I suddenly remembered that soon there would be an additional obstacle facing me. Only a few, short minutes thereafter, I made my return to the Giant Steps—one of many wonders found along Bondcliff Trail. I am not certain whether there actually was a name for that place, but I couldn't think of anything more suitable to call it other than Giant Steps.

It was a succession of dozens (if not hundreds) of large, rocky treads and formed a path down the mountainside in a steep, straight line. Many of the boulders, found in that massive stairway, were at least two to three feet high. Under normal conditions, it was by no means an easy task to undertake this passage. But now my body and mind were extremely overtired. With only one good leg on which to walk, I had no idea how to navigate the situation. Remaining upright while attempting a descent would be no less than suicide. One faltering footstep would

mean certain death. If I began to tumble, there was nothing to prevent a long and brutal plunge to the bottom.

Yet, as I approached this perilous *staircase*, I felt comforted by a familiar sensation. My entire face became magnetized once more by consoling, unseen hands. They directed the gaze of my eyes toward my own hands and toward the sticks I was holding. As this happened, my hands were also magnetized and a crystalline light enveloped both crutches. In that instant, I knew what must be done.

A bright apparition of myself appeared directly in front of me. In that vision I was performing brilliantly as a gymnast on a set of parallel bars, despite the fact that I never did well in gymnastics when I was younger. However, this metaphysical manifestation magnetized my entire body. Instantaneously, I was compelled to sit down on the top ledge of Giant Steps. A heightened, mesmeric force thrust both my hands to the ground. The crutches on either side of me were transformed inexplicably into a set of parallel bars.

Simultaneously, I tightened my grip on those bars and tucked in my abdomen. Then I lifted my legs upward until they were perpendicular with the rest of my body. Each end of either stick was firmly planted on an upper and lower step respectively. The central portions of my new parallel bars were like narrow bridges, suspended between the step ahead of me and the step behind. This allowed me to clutch the center of each stick with my hands; yet it prevented me from crushing my fingers between earth and poles. After all, the entire weight of my body bore down on my hands during every forward movement I made while undertaking that formidable flight of stairs.

All at once, crutches became feet and arms became legs. With my legs in midair in front of me, I slowly began to walk with my arms while clinging to both crutches. I lifted up one pole and placed it ahead of me. Subsequently, I would repeat the same movement with the other pole. Soon it became obvious that it was essential to take frequent rests. So after passing every two or three steps, I lowered my body to a seated position onto whatever rock happened to be below me at the moment.

It seemed as though my journey down the Giant Steps consumed an eternity. I couldn't begin to guess how long it actually took. Regardless of the time spent, it was nearing total darkness when I finally reached the bottom.

Now I was able to stand and resume my side-stepping along the trail. I pondered over the remarkable events that led me to this particular moment. Without the aid of those *walking*

sticks, the numerous challenges I encountered since the accident—especially those at Giant Steps—would have been insurmountable.

However, there were many more trials I would be forced to face while returning down Bondcliff Trail. Soon I would be approaching the first of a few brook crossings. No longer could I traverse any mountain stream by leaping from stone to stone across the swift and turbulent waters. I would be obliged to walk through numbingly cold currents, soaking my footwear in the passing.

The temperature already was well below freezing and continued to drop rapidly. Winds began to seethe now; and in every passing second their capacity to chill seemed to intensify. Urgently, I speculated how best to avert frostbite and hypothermia. There was the temptation to walk barefoot while wading through the water. Removing my shoes and socks would prevent them from getting drenched, and then my feet could stay dry and relatively warm once I managed to leave the creek behind.

Nevertheless, this wasn't a prudent plan. If I undressed my damaged foot, an inevitable increase in swelling would prevent me from ever putting it back into the shoe. Also, there was nothing to protect the injury from hidden rocks in the deep water; and it would be especially disastrous if I were to fall yet another time—caused by forceful and unpredictable undercurrents within the rush.

Consequently, when I arrived on the bank of the initial crossing, I rolled up both pant legs above my knees and reluctantly submerged feet, legs, shoes, and socks into an icy stream. With one or the other of my crutches, I probed continuously for undetectable potholes and rocks hidden underneath the surface of the dark, forbidding flood encircling me. Each footstep took minutes to complete. Absolute focus was required during every motion I made to avoid catastrophe. Even if my leg were miraculously spared from further harm, to lose my balance now and collapse into this frigid flow would result indubitably in hypothermia. Quite possibly, this could end any likelihood of survival.

There was nothing more critical than directing my attention to what I was doing presently and what was transpiring about me. I once more began to balance body and mind by expanding my breath and clearing away all extraneous thoughts.

Suddenly, I was overwhelmed by a wave of incalculable joy. In spite of the weariness, even while my skin burned and numbed from the freezing waters of the brook, I noticed that I was exceedingly happy. The incessant noise of raging rapids actually comforted me. An intense

elation permeated every thread of my being.

Blissfully, I considered quixotic patterns of liquefied merriment spinning playfully downstream. Complex designs of swirling, buoyant fluids bubbled, danced, and shimmered within the soft, shadowy confines of lantern light. Each perceptible sound and image, emerging out of the forest's black night, imbued me with delight. Such a reaction was wholly unexpected in so dire a situation.

Moreover, I was quietly humming to myself by the time I reached the other side of the brook. I even noticed a broad smile extending the breadth of my lips. No longer did I feel cold and pain seemed to evaporate from my senses. With melodious strains beginning to leap from my tongue, I sang aloud joyfully and resumed a confident side-step into the impending obscurity ahead of me.

While suspended in this enduring euphoria, all perception of time dissolved completely. It appeared as if I were transported instantly to the next water crossing. Although I am positive that traversing this second flow was more prolonged an ordeal than when I negotiated the first one, the entire process seemed to slip away in a momentary spark. Peace prevailed throughout the passage and gladness continued to reign equally over my thoughts and emotions. This ecstatic state charmed and enthralled me throughout most of the evening.

As I continued to progress gradually down the persistent, lightless bank, my lantern began to dim. Even though I had just replaced the lamp battery the night before, I swapped it with an unfamiliar brand I had never tested previously. Typically, a single battery would last more than forty hours, yet this one was failing after less than six hours of use. I normally kept an extra battery in my pack; however, this *was* the extra battery. I also had a flashlight, but it would have been unsteadying for me to hold the light. Besides, I needed my hands free for managing the crutches and maintaining physical balance.

For a time the din of running water grew fainter, and the night air became filled predominantly with blasts of raw wind roaring through the trees. My eyes, nose, and cheeks were bitten by these bitter gusts ripping past my face. Yet, while the mind stayed still and serene, my body remained impermeable to the ever-increasing coldness confronting me.

It was well into mid-evening when noises of the forest shifted once again. Growling outbursts of wind lessened temporarily, so the gentle, trickling sounds of water became more noticeable as they were dripping off hundreds of nearby boulders and ledges. But, at the same

time, the light from my lantern was virtually extinguished, and my body fell into a new wave of fatigue.

For the next half-hour, I proceeded with nearly no illumination. Parts of the pathway were frequently submerged in a heavy runoff, brought about by thunderstorms inundating the area early that morning. My hiking shoes were saturated with muck. Both my hands began to cramp mercilessly while clinging to those wooden poles without pause. Nearing total physical collapse, I persevered in trudging through the minor gushes cascading downward along the trail. Despite all the drudgery and my extreme overtiredness, an ongoing, inner exultation continued to uplift me, replenish me, and propel me onward.

Nevertheless, hidden within the darkened landscape ahead, a further peril was looming. The trail was about to drop off sharply onto a series of steep, slimy rock slabs. Water seeped out over much of these smooth surfaces, creating a precariously oily condition for walking. Unfortunately, the route before me would continue in this manner for a considerable distance. Even if I passed by these hindrances unscathed, I would still be faced with another brook crossing shortly thereafter.

Realistically, I knew I could never survive standing up while traveling downhill along that slick, stony corridor. Yet, maneuvering myself in a seated position, over dozens of slippery granite faces, meant that I would be thoroughly soaked for the remainder of a bitter and windy night. Aside from this, it was likely that I could be forced into an uncontrollable slide, due to the obvious lack of traction. If this were to happen, there would be an imminent danger of smashing my ailing foot into one of many boulders below. The only other possibility was to wobble down through the dense, unstable, brush-ridden perimeter. But bypassing these rocks in the trail would have been no less of a hazardous venture than choosing either alternative. Any conceivable option was just too risky to consider.

The beam from my lantern began to flicker in a series of final, faded, and silent stutters. My body was totally spent. The inexpressible inner quietude I experienced much of the day also seemed to be falling away. With one audible sigh of resignation, I conceded that I would go no further.

Yet where could I rest? For the longest time I had been searching for somewhere to sit even for a moment. However, every suitable surface was steeped in sheer wetness. Now, blustery currents of freezing air were greater than ever before. Cold and exhaustion had succeeded in penetrating me to the core. I had to find a place where I could unburden my feet

(and all of my bones) before falling unconscious.

I was nearing the embrace of utter weakness and about to crumble on bitter ground, when those familiarly magnetic and merciful hands turned my weathered frame around yet again. They coaxed me to move several yards back up the trail and face into darkened woods. During a decisive moment when all lingering light was extinguished from my lamp for the last time, I caught a fleeting glimpse of one, solitary tree raised up on a mound, shielded from much of the stormy weather by a sole cluster of bushes and boulders.

With newborn hope filling me, I anxiously let go of both crutches and removed my backpack from tender, throbbing shoulders. I retrieved a flashlight from the lower pouch in my pack and directed its bright beam towards that singular tree. I determined being only about twenty feet from where it stood. So after picking up all the gear, feebly I stumbled through a final few paces to that inimitable shelter.

Within moments, I came face-to-face with a grand old tree—silently shooting upward into the blackened sky. I was encouraged to discover that the base of this shadowy tower was embraced by a nest of minute, mossy fern. It was the only patch of green earth I had seen since early in the day. Completely dry and well-softened, this luxuriant lair wrapped itself tenderly around the wizened, elderly trunk. I was amazed to discover this isolated knoll amid such slush. Veritably, here happened to be the one place I could actually rest.

It was ultimate relief to free myself from the burden of my backpack for the last time that evening. Immediately, I unloaded three jackets out of the pack. The first I spread on top of the supple fern bed, creating a padded, insulating mat where I could sit. The second one I draped over the ski cap on my head, for added protection against the wind. The last one I used to cover my legs, before putting them into a plastic lawn bag that served occasionally as a rain shield. Now it would guard me from the wind as well.

Prior to tucking my legs into plastic, I took my undamaged foot out of its wet sock and shoe and redressed it with two dry socks to keep it as warm as possible. Sadly, the same benefit couldn't be bestowed upon my other foot. However, while convincing myself that it was still beneficial to keep the injury cold, I applied more arnica to the affected areas before wrapping up my lower body entirely. As before, this remedy reduced the swelling and pain quickly and substantially, providing (if not warmth and dryness) at least a fair amount of additional comfort.

Once these things were accomplished, I attempted to settle into the most relaxing position possible. And after situating myself up against the base of the tree to support my worn

and aching back, I finally was able to stretch out both legs. As my entire body began to unwind, an intense yearning to close my eyes immediately came over me. However, succumbing to such a desire could have proven fatal.

Considering how frail my physical condition had become and how rapidly the temperature was continuing to drop, I might not have been able to regain consciousness ever again—even if only the slightest slumber overtook me. So I began to rock my upper body in gentle, bowing gestures, swaying forward and downward, before returning continually to an upright position. Recognizing how essential it was for me to stay awake, I persisted with these dreary motions throughout the next hour.

It would have consoled me greatly to keep the flashlight lit while performing these tedious tasks of rocking and swaying. However, knowing that my remaining batteries mustn't be squandered, I doused the light without delay. The overpowering obscurity of the forest blinded me; and never having felt more wretched or alone, I now was sightless and exiled—suspended in the fathomless abyss of that ubiquitous, black night.

Intermittently, I heard shouting accompanied by music from a radio. This unanticipated commotion rose up the pathway in persuasive swells. During these brief moments my expectations soared. Thinking that the voices I heard had to be those of several individuals coming to find me, I called back to them anxiously, shouting and whistling with any residual strength I could muster. My parched and feeble croaks crackled into every seam of the encompassing darkness.

But prolonged silence hung in the air after each of my efforts failed to invoke a response from them. When their voices rang out again, this time they broke into laughter. It didn't take long to realize that what I was actually hearing were only the sounds of revelers celebrating at some far-off campsite in the valley below.

This gave rise to an inevitability I did not want to face. Hidden beneath my waning optimism, the ravenous beast of disappointment lunged out of my belly, devouring all remaining hope. Although I persevered in sustaining my wits for most of that hour, every remaining fragment of composure suddenly and utterly dissolved.

I screamed, I shuddered, I wept, and I wailed. For one brief moment I begged for death. But this ephemeral fit of self-pity soon was interrupted by the familiar, pervasive, and quiet voice I had come to know so well. It originated from within me but still resonated throughout the silent space around me.

While its heartening words permeated even the air I was ingesting into myself, the grief I felt fell away in a flash. A divine accord was recalled to my emotions and to my mind, so unimaginable delight instantly re-emerged in this most unlikely of all circumstances. Surprisingly, I started to sing as peace replenished my soul. An improvised melody sprung forth—accompanying some poetic words I wrote decades earlier. So the once-treacherous, pitch-black stillness no longer filled me with dread or despair.

In other instances, where some sort of additional light played an essential role in getting me out of various nighttime predicaments—or at least provide some well-needed solace and hope—I always seemed to have the uncommon knack of being able to call upon a sort of night vision[45] and brighten any visual obscurity blinding my normal sense of sight. However, during this occasion, it just didn't seem to work in any practical way whatsoever.

Despite not seeming to be able to call upon this crucial ability, the quandary-at-hand began to feel more heartening nonetheless. Even as I continued the repetitious rocking of my body to prevent me from falling into a fatally unending sleep, those motions were no longer dull and witless as they had been earlier. Everything instead transmuted into ruminations and illumination. Finally able to open my weather-worn lips once again, I feebly half-sung and half-whispered a stirring song from my heart upon the stillness of that night:

Listen for the soundless sound,
A voice which no one hears.
The silent music soars within,
Its deafening stillness fills our ears.

Sense this music of the night,
Magical utterance of clear starlight.
It paints nocturnal, noiseless notes:

[45] Later in the book, I will discuss how I began to master the perception of seeing in the dark. This alternative sight of mine became both a skill and an actual sense that I found to be reliable for decades. I had been using it effectively to assist me (along with various other people) in avoiding potentially disastrous outcomes to several hazardous situations throughout the years.

Nevertheless, when this particular accident did occur, I wasn't able to access my night vision readily nor consistently. I can only assume that one reason why it didn't work for me then was due to the fact that I hadn't used it regularly for a very long time. Perhaps, I was simply out of practice.

But another possible cause might have been due to the fact I was totally exhausted, emotionally depleted, and in shock for hours. It may have produced enough trauma in body and mind so that my unique form of seeing couldn't function properly. After all, whenever I employed the unorthodox perception before the accident, it took a great deal of concentration, and this specific type of mental focus was something I found extremely difficult to maintain once I had become injured.

Twinkling, glittering, sparkling, shining…

Mighty artist's strokes release
A pounding quietude against our minds.
This blinds all human reasoning
With a roaring, rushing peace.[46]

After finishing the final word of the song, my inner voice spoke again and continued to encourage me gently. Amid intoning its countless reassurances, I was unexpectedly prompted to ask if anyone was returning for me soon. An immediate answer resounded resolutely in the affirmative. But before I had a moment to inquire when this would happen, faint flickers of light sifted softly through the trees further down the trail.

At first, I feared that I was hallucinating. I blinked my eyes over and over again to see if this might end the delirium I seemed to be encountering. Instead, the light continued to grow stronger. Within seconds, a nearly-tangible and radiant ray burst brightly from a single headlamp materializing before me. The peace—which I now felt—erupted into sheer rapture. Grabbing my flashlight, I quickly turned it on to signal the approaching apparition; and I called out to it hoarsely, deluded into believing that even my weakest utterances might further assist in revealing where I was.

Nonetheless, a warm and welcoming voice shouted back to me straight away. It was the hiker who I had met that afternoon. Feeling immense gratitude for his return, yet hardly able to believe that it was he who had arrived, I responded with the happiest and most enthusiastic greeting I could conjure.

Although having hiked a significant distance more than he had planned for that day, and definitely must have been extremely tired by this time, not once did his countenance betray any visible signs of fatigue. He continued to speak to me energetically and cheerfully. All at once, he opened up his pack and offered me food, extra clothing, and a hot beverage.

---

[46] These verses were written soon after I moved to the White Mountains during the mid-1970s. At the time I called them, "Nativity's Silent Voice Within". From the onset, they were intended to be used as lyrics for a choral piece I was planning to compose. But circumstances intervened and more than ten years passed before I would combine both music and text together as a single work.

But in the end, this composition was lost anyway (along with its copies and a vast majority of my other creative work) when a flood ravaged my home in 2007. By mere coincidence, these words did survive the deluge, since an extra copy fortuitously had been kept apart from all of the other works that were ultimately destroyed.

The reason for making another photocopy was because I soon planned to compose an art song for mezzo soprano, oboe, and piano; and the words were to become the lyrics. However, the piece was never written. Instead, I was forced to leave the house and abruptly fell into homelessness thereafter.

During the next several minutes, I had no choice but to abandon all discomfort and my prevailing sense of exhaustion. This hiker's words of encouragement and his countless, ensuing gestures of kindheartedness totally revitalized my being. Each of his noble efforts to assist this total stranger filled me with immense appreciation and admiration. The sound of his voice, the added warmth from extra mittens and woolen socks he brought with him, the lamplight he provided, and even his tins of cold, processed grub gave me solace and satisfaction in a way I had never felt before.

Once I finished eating, we began to converse more readily. Apparently, it was just after nine p.m. when he discovered me here resting under the tree. The rescue team had been notified. However, it would take some time for them to assemble and get organized, so the hiker decided to return up the footpath and remain with me until the others could arrive. He asked me about the events of my day, and I briefly explained some of what had transpired. Then he spoke of the extraordinary occurrences that led him to our first meeting.

About three miles due east of Bondcliff Trail, he had been hiking on a parallel path, the Franconia Brook Trail. As he was making his way out of the forest, something compelled him to glance continually at the ridge of mountains separating those two tracks. Unexpectedly, he exclaimed to himself that he had never bushwhacked up in that direction before. So, by sheer impulse and without hesitation, he deviated from the trail into the thick of the woods and made an arduous ascent to the top.

After reaching one of the crests on that ridge, he fully intended to return along the same route he had just forged. But instead, an irresistible force kept urging him to the other side. He could only tread forward unwittingly towards our remarkable meeting below Bondcliff.

As he was making his way across those heights, he found himself caught in a sea of virtually impenetrable fir trees. It was increasingly more difficult to look past the thick branches surrounding his head on all sides; and he finally recognized the near-impossibility to move any further in a forward direction.

While entangled in the heart of this quagmire, unconsciously he directed his sight towards both feet below him. Expecting to see his boots planted on firm soil, he was shocked to discover he had managed to cross successfully onto a structure of suspended, dangling, gnarled, and knotted roots. After a brief moment examining his situation, he realized that he was perched in midair—high above actual ground—hanging off the side of an enormous precipice.

Acutely aware of this predicament, he quickly resolved to make an immediate U-turn and

head back to the path along Franconia Brook. But instead, something intangible incited him to ignore his plan to retreat. So once again, he persevered and forced his way ahead until reaching Bondcliff Trail.

After surfacing from the woods onto the path, it took him only five minutes to arrive where we first encountered each other earlier in the day. Both of us mused that if he hadn't been inspired to bushwhack across that extremely dense and harsh terrain, we never would have met. If I hadn't found the fortitude to haul myself down from below the cliffs, we never would have met. Even if he came into the trail, but I failed to manage that grueling, one-mile stretch before four pm, our paths would have never crossed. I would have been left to face my trials without the aid of others, and it is certain that the outcome would have been very different.

While disclosing our day's adventures to one another, numerous beams from lanterns started glimmering through the woods. A volley of shouting voices suddenly rocketed towards us. It was just about ten p.m. when the first members of the rescue team made their approach. Once all of them appeared, there was a total of twelve individuals in the group: three women and nine men.

A paramedic tended to my injuries immediately. While working swiftly and efficiently, he offhandedly inquired about what had happened to me earlier. When I described the events of the day to him, he was curious to know how I was able to come so far down the trail after sustaining such a severe injury. He was especially interested in knowing how I maneuvered my way down through those Giant Steps.

As I explained what had happened, he smiled and shook his head in amazement. He indicated how greatly relieved he was to find that I had discovered a way to pass that section of the trail by myself, admitting both he and the rest of the team had no idea how to get me past there. Even with several people supporting me on a litter, if one of them slipped or stumbled, all of us could have fallen to the bottom like a house of cards.

As he persisted with his questions, a burst of emotion welled up within me. After all, I was physically and mentally exhausted, my body was in serious shock from the ongoing traumas I had been enduring for hours, and I was further overcome by the sudden presence of so many lights and so many people. Yet, as soon as my ankle was secured in a splint, I started to feel calmer again—and greatly relieved. After every preparation was made for our departure, I then was strapped snuggly onto a stretcher. Now we were almost ready for the long procession homeward.

Once all of my rescuers had gathered up their equipment, the group of twelve then was divided into two teams. Six would lug the litter (three on either side) and six would follow behind. Whenever even one who was carrying me began to fatigue, the other team instantly took over. As we approached each of the remaining streambeds, those following behind would go into the currents so I could be handed down to them. Keeping my body held well above water level, one team painstakingly would deliver me to the opposite bank, where the remaining six were waiting for their charge to be passed back up to them.

In this fashion I was carted for more than five miles down Bondcliff Trail and along the Wilderness Trail to Franconia Brook. Once we crossed the footbridge, a well-heated truck was standing by to transport me the last three miles upon remnant, rough, and rotten railroad ties still marking much of the surface of Lincoln Woods Trail.

That flight on a stretcher was one of the most amazing passages of my life. I have hiked hundreds of times at night, but this was the only occasion when I had the extraordinary opportunity to glide silently through darkness horizontally. It is true that most sections of the trip were rugged, bumpy, and not conducive to *gliding*. Nevertheless, a profound perception of this motion permeated my senses, despite the actual, physical conditions to which I was being subjected.

While silently slipping by the myriad stars appearing through constant cracks in the wooded canopy overhead, I nonetheless seemed to be weightless above the forest floor, suspended somewhere between earth and sky, levitating effortlessly in a state that was both serene and surreal. Despite my extremities being painfully cold and increasingly numb from prolonged exposure, all of my thoughts regained harmony and balance. The crew members surrounding me were wonderful. There was never a single moment when I didn't feel utterly secure in their care. Indeed, I shall always be infinitely grateful to everyone who helped me that day.

By the time I reached the hospital, it was three-fifteen in the morning. When an attending physician heard that the rescue squad found me in the wilderness, he became very excited and asked where I had been hiking. As soon as I mentioned the word *Bondcliff*, he smiled. Immediately thereafter, he laughed and clapped his hands. Many hikers with whom I have spoken reacted similarly. Before he began to examine me, he interjected with a rhetorical question I have heard so many times in the past:

Isn't Bondcliff the most perfect place in the White Mountains?

V.

Choices between miracles and mortal mistakes...

Both of these two preceding excursions into wilderness areas each manifested a strikingly different and unique series of events requiring the recognition and rendering of numerous, spontaneous, decisive, and (in the second instance) difficult choices. Because I was compelled to implement again and again active or passive responses to each moment's occurrences, what I did ultimately in every situation was simply to practice making each choice either consciously or unconsciously, consistently or inconsistently, correctly or incorrectly, completely or incompletely.

However, if we consider the description of duality offered earlier, we might conclude these eight practice types implemented were simply pairs of dualistic extremes in themselves. Not unlike any other dichotomy, they must ride endlessly on that perpetually jarring seesaw—whereby being conscious, consistent, correct, and complete neither would be more desirable nor more beneficial than being unconscious, inconsistent, incorrect, and incomplete.

When it *seems* that we have practiced perfectly the *Four Cs* (that is to say, having practiced consciously, consistently, correctly, and completely) and yet continually battle with opposites, then the bona fide *Four Cs* haven't actually been realized or manifested—only their dualistic counterfeits. So, in these cases (as with all others), if the *Four Cs* were authentic, they had to be entirely without opposites and consequently without duality. They needed to exist solely within the divine fulcrum of balance and oneness and, therefore, exist exclusively within divine love.

In the first of the two stories I just recounted above, if I hadn't established some sort of balance and foresight to change my plans in an instant and rush back towards the car to retrieve

pen and paper, those elusive words sung to me by the raging waters would have fled out of my consciousness forever—never to be heard or uttered again. And even more dramatically, during the episode of my hiking accident, if I hadn't continually refocused and balanced myself with some semblances of the *Four Cs* throughout the ordeal, odds are I would never have met up with that fellow hiker who came to my rescue and possibly saved me from a lonely and traumatic death.

Ultimately, it was my well-practiced ability and willingness to change my thoughts, my attitudes, and my plans over and over again within the confines of both of those two very limited time periods that ultimately twice-changed the direction and outcome of my life. The nineteenth-century American psychologist William James[47] summed up such outcomes with the following observation:

> The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind.

However (about two hundred years earlier), the eminent English poet John Milton also expressed similar sentiments, so perhaps those insights James' cited as being the greatest discovery of his time would best be considered as a rediscovery instead:

> The mind is its own place and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.

To resume our discussion regarding the *Four Cs* (or more precisely, about being conscious, consistent, correct, and complete), I was referring only to the balanced and loving condition of being divinely conscious, divinely consistent, divinely correct, and divinely complete. After all, any practice not residing within this state is fully dualistic in nature and singularly capable of sowing, fertilizing, growing, nurturing, and perpetuating weeds. In order to fully understand how to recognize, initiate, instill, and ultimately practice divine love, it is first essential to comprehend the following weeds and their dualistic opposites that briefly were mentioned earlier in the chapter: ego, attachment, and illusion.

[47] William James (1842–1910) was an American philosopher and psychologist who has often been referred to as *the Father of American psychology*.

Oftentimes, ego indicates egotism or self-esteem. Ego,[48] superego,[49] and id[50] can be employed as psychoanalytic designations representing the three portions of the psyche. But ego also can indicate the individual self that is separate from all others—with an acute awareness and preoccupation of that separation. It is precisely this description of ego that will serve all purposes of discussion here. Within this dualistic condition of ego we perpetually propel ourselves towards, yearn for, and yet grapple with countless opposites such as oneness, fulfillment, and completion. The corporeal self (represented by the ego) starves for love, other virtues, and dualistic and non-dualistic fulfillments of all kinds—including success, fame, power, control, comfort, and safety, to name just a few. However, ego can never achieve true realization of these sought-after states, because it functions only through the paradoxes of *illusion* and *attachment*.

When ego strives to attain love or any other virtue, it does so by clinging to and clutching an illusionary opposite—to that which it erroneously feels it doesn't already comprise. This is the function of attachment. Yet all true virtues evade the ego, because it is impossible to attach to that which already is integrated and one within all of us, one with entirety.

In truth, divine attributes *are* everything. They are the sole legitimacy of the garden. They are the flowers, the fruits, and the herbs. They are our true nature.

Everything else refusing this truth is a weed. Illusion is a weed. Ego is a weed. Attachment is a weed. Furthermore, conversely and dualistically, all weeds also are permeated with ego, illusion, and attachment. They endure hopelessly by dominating, confining, confusing, misleading, deceiving, smothering, and burying—vainly attempting to manipulate, control, and even replace all veritableness of the garden.

Some might contend that since weeds operate in the garden, are they not a true part of the garden as well? In actuality, weeds are merely truth out of balance. They are malnourished.

---

[48] According to *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary*, ego is:

> …one of the three divisions of the psyche in psychoanalytic theory that serves as the organized conscious mediator between the person and reality, especially by functioning both in the perception of and adaptation to reality.

[49] Also, according to *Merriam-Webster*, superego is:

> …one of the three divisions of the psyche in psychoanalytic theory that is only partly conscious, represents internalization of parental conscience and the rules of society, and functions to reward and punish through a system of moral attitudes, conscience, and a sense of guilt.

[50] *Merriam-Webster* states that id is:

> …one of the three divisions of the psyche in psychoanalytic theory that is completely unconscious and is the source of psychic energy derived from instinctual needs and drives.

They are distorted. They are unconscious and perennially asleep. They have forgotten how to access the fundamental nutrient that is key to their awakening. Inadvertently, they have denied themselves access to the divine love within—love which dissolves all ego, illusion, and attachment—uniting every aspect of creation in oneness and balance.

As I wandered about the wilderness in New Hampshire, it was critical for me to discern between actually functioning productively and compassionately within the infinite landscape of the mind garden or falling inevitably back into the weeds—into the misleading illusions which hide each of life's verities from us within duality. Preceding that infamous hiking accident, while for months spending every day meditating in the woods, I consciously practiced balancing body, mind, and spirit with all aspects of my being.

However, like anyone who has experienced weeding a vegetable or flower garden, the more I weeded the more that weeds seemed to pop up in the newly tilled soil. It was then that I realized why conscious tending to the mind garden must be practiced ad infinitum, essentially during each breath we take. It was indispensable for me to practice divine love, balance, and oneness during all of my waking moments.

This might raise the argument that it is just too difficult and time-consuming to maintain such a demanding practice. Nevertheless, which is more desirable: continuous practice that ultimately embraces perfect joy, love, health, and balance in our lives, or an ongoing, unconscious practice yielding disruptive, imbalanced, inconsistent, and impeding results? No matter how we conduct ourselves, we carry out the functions of one type of practice or another during every moment, without cessation, regardless of whether we perform those functions consciously or mindlessly.

The oblivious practice of careless thinking and living is no less difficult or time-consuming than consciously practicing divine attributes in our lives. It only may appear that way while we attempt to justify our unbalanced actions, by blindly and uselessly measuring one completely unrelated activity against another. First of all, how can we actually assess anything while existing in a state of unconsciousness? Every comparison we make in this condition can be nothing more than illusion unto itself. Furthermore, unconscious measuring is done merely for the dualistic purposes of achieving, controlling, or dominating; and the rationalization and attainment of these measurements are a derivate of striving. Each of these are simply more dichotomous activities of the ego.

However, the more we actually practice those genuine *Four Cs* in our thoughts, in our

hearts, and in our lives, the more we will discover an indisputable facility for existing and functioning exclusively within the essential and miraculous truths of the garden. However, unconscious practice never is easy, simple, or balanced—no matter how much we might like to convince ourselves of this being the case. Its dualistic nature always fills us with the unending struggles and contradictions of opposites.

As I was making my way towards Bondcliff on that ostensibly fated afternoon in October 2007, I suddenly succumbed to sadness and worry while navigating the slippery rocks below the cliffs. I had lost my ability to maintain any sense of wellbeing.

I instead began practicing unconsciously the dualistic struggles of striving for happiness, peace, and balance while continuously sliding into imbalances caused by fear, worry, and regret. I lost my ability to focus on what I was doing and where I was going presently. I forgot to center myself within the all-compassionate, all-healing, and all-resolving divine fulcrum of love. Consequently, an unwitting and unmindful practice took hold of me—inciting the instantaneous reemergence of weeds (those of impending disaster, suffering, and trauma) that I had frequently sown throughout my childhood and adolescence.

Yet (years earlier), when I found myself copying down poems that were sung to me by the various, rushing mountain waters, a different sort of thought-seed—essential for such manifestations to occur—already had been planted thoroughly during my teens. After all, I spent much time alone in the woods and deeply believed in the interconnectedness of all things. My deep convictions of a universal oneness (combined with an equally determined faith in experiencing the mystical and miraculous) frequently brought me face-to-face with seemingly inexplicable and wondrous occurrences.

Many of these experiences were seen as extraordinary by some and nothing more than *hallucinations*[51] by the more skeptical among us. Regardless of how they were perceived by others, I personally came to the conclusion that they were merely blossoms, sporadically tainted with weeds emanating within our mind garden.

Several decades ago, countless weeds were implanted in my mind from both individual and group thoughts—those sown unconsciously for extensive periods of time. They included my own personal thoughts and the collective thoughts of family, friends, and acquaintances. They also included an endless stream of jarring information that continually affected me while

[51] This topic will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

watching the nightly news and being engaged with other forms of media.

All of these were a vast array of illusory ideas, injected not only into my own thoughts, but also into the immeasurable individual and group thoughts of humanity everywhere. At the time, I was taught by some family members, friends, and teachers that it was genuinely important to be always well-informed. This certainly could have been the primary reason why I so readily took to heart all the horrors (both real and sensationalized) assaulting my senses daily from radio and television news broadcasts.[52]

Unfortunately, this endless spurting of poisonous prattle infected all that I had practiced in thought, in emotion, and in action throughout most of my youthful years; and consequently—when I least expected it to happen—any number of wily weeds from the past would burst into full bloom within a present moment. They threatened all that I had practiced consciously and once again jeopardized my life in this garden of balance, oneness, and divine love.

At any given moment following my accident on the mountain, it was thoroughly plausible for me to have given way entirely to panic and despair. (This is something that various members of my family and nightly news had taught me well throughout my earlier life.) And although I briefly submitted to this unstable state after I fell for the second time on the mountain (and again that night, while I was sitting on the mossy mound, totally exhausted and in complete darkness), I constantly was reminded to rebalance myself—thereby continually averting the blossoming of impending disaster and suffering that had been planted unconsciously in my beliefs so many times in the past.

Yet, why is it that I was reminded repeatedly by an external guiding voice or by invisible hands rather than simply being prompted by my own conscious thoughts? Undoubtedly, it had to be because I was thoroughly taught the belief of divine intervention. This notion I practiced for many years until I came to accept it unequivocally. In truth, the guiding voice, the divine

---

[52] It is definitely true that being informed can be an essential tool for making intelligent decisions about a wide variety of things, including voting, public health issues, preparedness for severe weather and sudden natural and manmade disasters. However, if we overindulge ourselves with excessive doses of information fed to us through the media, we can find ourselves in a constant state of depression and hopelessness, leaving us vulnerable to many unexpected challenges suddenly intruding upon our lives.

During my childhood and adolescence, this was precisely what happened to me. Especially during high school, there were a couple of teachers who instilled in me the almost obsessive need to be informed about everything. Consequently, I couldn't pass even a single day without reading a considerable number of newspaper articles along with heavy doses of viewing TV news broadcasts as well. And because of my constant exposure to everything disastrous and negative going on in the world, this type of information did take its toll on me.

And nowadays, with not only the huge number of news programs on television, there's probably a much broader selection of news shows (including an enormous amount of disinformation and propaganda shows) that I have realized how severely affecting they are to enormous numbers of individuals within our society.

hands, the prophetic visions, and many other types of seemingly mystical manifestations (or hallucinations) were prompted through years of practiced thought and subsequent belief.

Regardless of how endless insights found their way into my conscious awareness, if I hadn't regularly exercised a balanced and loving condition throughout the six hundred thirty miles of hiking that season, it is unlikely that I could have survived the ordeal returning from Bondcliff, because there was just too much I had previously practiced that could have easily caused my demise. If I instead succumbed to that state of perpetual panic and fear—equally familiar to me—I would have deafened myself to any guiding perceptions, regardless of the forms that they might have assumed.

Chances of finding the walking sticks at two of the most critical moments that day might have never happened if fright distracted me from sensing their location—revealed by those compelling, unseen, and grace-filled hands. There were hundreds, if not thousands, of moments that could easily have borne the fruit of tragedy if I hadn't mindfully and systematically weeded out those destructive possibilities again and again—one way or another.

Throughout the entire journey that day, I continuously sowed seeds of witting and unwitting thought. While in total concert with my emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions, those particular thoughts of the day (and many of my individual and group thoughts of the past) gave birth to blossoming outcomes manifesting within each split-second occurrence.

During many other instances throughout my life, there were countless situations when those compelling, invisible hands had intervened to rescue me from an unfortunate end—including death. There were even a few occasions when unseen hands saved not only my own life but the lives of several others as well. One instance of this happening was during my first year at college in Maryland. However, unlike the extensive challenges I faced below Bondcliff, this incident took place in a matter of seconds…

Throughout the late 1960s race riots afflicted much of Baltimore, just as they seriously crippled so many American cities during that period. Although my studies there didn't begin until August of 1970, inner-city unrest and disorder continued to prevail. An eight o'clock curfew was in effect. Dressed in protective riot gear with bullet-proof vests and helmets, rugged pairs of cops patrolled the downtown area every night. Each duo was accompanied by one or two highly-trained German Shepherds. On several occasions I even witnessed National Guard tanks rumbling down the asphalt right past my dormitory window at school.

Arsonists were on a rampage. There was never a week that passed without nearby

residents being assaulted by the ongoing, pervasive sights, sounds, and smells emanating from warehouses and factories smoldering or fully ablaze. From fire trucks, ambulances, police cars, and emergency vehicles, sirens sliced the air with their blatantly mind-numbing wails, whines, and blasts.

Occasionally, portions of the city center were virtually a war zone. In the evening sulfuric vapors poured skyward above buildings and streets into a grimy, starless, crimson-smeared gloom. Many times the air became so severely riddled with smoke that it was nearly impossible not to choke and gag while walking out-of-doors. Regardless, I did find this turmoil exciting at times. However, more frequently I felt as though I were trapped in some surreal, unearthly, and hellish domain—light-years from the tranquility of my native countryside for which I often yearned.

On one unseasonably cold and windy November evening, I was walking back to school with three friends. The four of us were returning from our extended wanderings about the city. Now, only a block from the school entrance, we were forced to stop at a busy street corner. Waiting impatiently for the light to change, we huddled together amid a cluster of several other people all standing very close to the edge of the sidewalk. We were preparing to bolt across Centre Street to the opposite side, once the crosswalk sign signaled us to proceed.

At this particular corner, the Charles Street traffic approached us along an extended, downward grade. Buses and cars tended to accelerate through this section of the roadway. It might have seemed essential to some for gaining enough momentum to climb up the sudden, steep rise in the next block—which was also part of Mount Vernon Place.

Even as my friends and I chattered away excitedly (leaping from one extraneous topic to another), an unexpected feeling arose from within me. My entire body became magnetized and my head seemed to be caught in the determined grip of an indiscernible set of resonant hands. This was one of the earliest times in my life when I began to recognize this type of experience with *mesmeric hands* while it was actually happening.

Still relatively unfamiliar with the bizarre sensations these so-called *hands* tended to emit, I adamantly resisted their irresistible hold on me. Despite this, my attention was still driven askance towards a bus just coming into view. The large vehicle was yet a couple of blocks south of where we stood on Charles Street, but I nevertheless became briefly aware of its presence when my head (and consequently) my eyes were pushed forcibly to the left.

However, as a somewhat obstinate reaction to this unexpected repositioning of my skull,

I promptly brought my head back to where it was just a few seconds earlier—with a deliberate and determined thrust. For then I could continue interacting with my friends once again.

But those bizarrely electrified hands stubbornly persisted in moving my head sideways several more times, so the oncoming bus would appear within my line of sight again and again. Each time their magnetic clutch coerced my awareness towards the bus, I quickly began to realize that there was nothing ordinary about the vehicle. Incredulously, it looked as if it were actually glowing. Enveloped in a sinister, bright-blackish light, it also seemed to be accelerating at an alarming speed. However, I tried to ignore it and kept pulling my gaze back to my friends, as we continued with our laughter and our playful banter.

After undergoing a few minutes of these cranial acrobatics, there was one last time when my head twisted sideways with even more force than previously. In the back of my mind I suspected that the bus might be traveling dangerously fast; but before I had even a moment to truly consider the gravity of our situation, an indescribable, electric surge spiked through my pores like lightning. The atmosphere around me was fractured by an unearthly utterance. This sudden vocalization shattered my ears and pierced my mind as it reverberated the word *death* through the air.

Within a split second, those pulsating, magnetic hands spun me around to face the entire curbside crowd. It seemed as though an intangible wave was hurling me into the unsuspecting pack. My body effectively shoved everyone away from the street corner. Ultimately, I knocked several individuals to the ground while falling directly over two of them.

In that same instant, the bus lunged onto the sidewalk like a maniacal beast. It thundered passed us, missed crushing us only by inches, flew off of the curb into the Centre Street intersection, shot through a red light into opposing traffic, and nearly flipped over before smashing down onto its left wheels—while the right ones remained high above the pavement.

Despite this perilous situation, the mechanized fiend never relinquished its furious charge up the hill. Seeming to ignore all present hazards, it continued to swing violently back and forth while continuing to accelerate further, shaking uncontrollably from one side to the other.

Nearing the crest in the road, close to the center of Mount Vernon Place, the unrelenting, irrepressible autobus suddenly stabilized—once all of its wheels slammed simultaneously back onto the ground. In the next brief moment, with its engine screaming over the din of traffic and above the rumblings of an entire city, this unholy vessel abruptly vanished into oblivion as it blasted beyond our constrained horizon.

Countless minutes passed and no one on that street corner could move. We were frozen in a state of unqualified bewilderment. By rights, all of us should have perished then. Everyone present on that street corner gaped at me in awe. Futilely, I attempted to hide my feelings of embarrassment and confusion for the uncanny role I had just played in this inconceivable episode.

Once we began to help each other up off the frigid walkway, a middle-aged man in the crowd looked fearfully into my eyes and gasped:

How on earth did you see that coming?

The only response I could manage was to shake my head numbly and whisper back to him in hushed and trembling tones:

I don't really know…

Several years after the incident in Baltimore occurred, I was fortunate to fulfill a childhood dream by moving to the White Mountains of New Hampshire with my wife in June of 1976. Just before our arrival in the Granite State,[53] I discovered a beautiful, secluded log home that was just coming available to rent. I immediately signed a lease and we lived there for six years. Aside from a reclusive, elderly Quaker woman, all of our other year-round neighbors lived more than two miles away. The house site was situated nearly twenty-one hundred feet above sea level on the side of a small mountain. This elevation wouldn't be considered very high in the western mountains of the United States. However, in eastern parts of the country, such an altitude is thought of as being considerable.

The mountain on which we resided rose up out of one end of an idyllic plateau that stretched westward for three miles. Then the terrain dropped off sharply towards the nearby Connecticut River Valley. There were four pristine lakes that graced the landscape of this unique tableland, and a diverse assortment of wildlife inhabited the region.

Loon laughter could be heard across the waters at dusk. A family of black bears congregated outside of our kitchen during the warmer weather. They especially were fond of the uncommonly sweet and enormous wild raspberries that grew fruitfully around the front and side porches. An assortment of hummingbirds thrived on wildflowers that flourished near the house. Occasionally, we were visited by a remarkably curious and amicable snowshoe rabbit

[53] Nickname for New Hampshire.

who boldly sat next to me while I whistled to him softly. A mother grouse often would hop onto the porch and accompany my indoor piano practice with ungodly shrieks while proudly watching over her babies feed upon an abundant variety of seeds close at hand.

There was one, mild summer afternoon when a golden eagle perched majestically above me on the overhanging branch of an aged and elegant hemlock. He remained there for the longest time, looking out over the forest, periodically glancing down at me as I wrote poem after poem beneath him.

Feisty, pint-sized mink indignantly snarled and snapped at me when I accidentally picked up firewood that was protecting the entrance to their hidden, woodland dwelling. On an Indian-summer's eve I ran barefoot at full throttle down a rough, gravel lane towards a pier on one of those lakes. Simultaneously, my ears anxiously focused upon the incessant, angry squeals coming from a wild boar not far behind.[54]

Because there were no artificial lights polluting the nocturnal sky for miles in any direction and—for several months—we lived totally without electricity, I then began to develop exceptionally keen night vision. Even within the darkest of nighttimes, I might hike shoeless and lightless into the most dense regions of the forest. Frequently venturing from our doorstep to the top of Piermont Mountain in this manner, an occasional black bear would follow me up the trail merely out of curiosity.

After late suppers (as was mentioned earlier), we often would lie on the soft, dry meadow near Lake Tarleton where shooting stars were commonly sighted. Recurrently, both of us could expect to be mystified and inspired by the improvised light-displays of the aurora borealis. Dancing swirls, streaks, smudges, sparkles, and splashes would erupt into vibrant, multicolored choreographies—consuming the entire night sky from horizon to horizon with a mesmerizing radiance. In early morning hours, these northern lights always became their most animated. Nearly every conceivable hue would reveal itself in those ecstatic ballets above.

Nowhere in the northeast region of the United States have I ever witnessed such dazzling demonstrations. Even when traveling just a mile off of the plateau, the intense, expansive shifting of firmamental colorations always lessened considerably, and these celestial illuminations usually faded into shades of pastel blue and milky white. But as soon as we

[54] Although wild boar are not native to this part of the world, they apparently were one of many of the exotic animals that were imported to an exclusive, local hunting reserve in central New Hampshire. It is known as Corbin's Park, located in the town of Grantham. Stretching over some 25,000 acres, the private club is surrounded by a twenty-six mile fence. Occasionally, that extensive enclosure has been breached and there have been subsequent incidents where non-indigenous creatures were sited while they were roaming about the central and northern regions of the state.

returned to this upland refuge, the heavenly lights would immediately burst back into indescribable, kaleidoscopic spectacles of color-in-motion.

Oftentimes, when I did sight the countless shooting stars there—forever streaking across that deep night sky—the immortal words of James Agee would resonate simultaneously their blessed though questioning affirmation through my mind:

> Sure on this shining night
> Of star-made shadows round,
> Kindness must watch for me
> This side the ground.
>
> The late year lies down the north.
> All is healed, all is health.
> High summer holds the earth.
> Hearts are whole.
>
> Sure on this shining night
> I weep for wonder
> Wand'ring far alone
> Of shadows on the stars…[55]

It was only a few months after our relocation to this mountain home when magnetic hands intervened in my life once again. Friends from New York City and Edmonton, Alberta came to the White Mountains to spend Thanksgiving with us. Just before their departure we decided to venture into town for one final dinner celebration. For the first two miles of driving, there was no precipitation. However, when we were nearing the edge of the plateau it began to mist. The moment we began our descent down the long, steep, winding road to the valley, the pavement ahead of us suddenly shone brightly with a fresh, frozen, icy glaze.

Already proceeding downhill, I attempted to gently tap the brakes in order to slow down gradually to a full stop. Sadly, there was no traction between tires and the ground, so we began

[55] An American poet, novelist, and activist, James Agee (1909–1955) published his first book of poems *Permit Me Voyage* in 1934. The lines quoted above are from a piece included in that collection: "Description of Elysium". This particular portion of the poem became well-known because it also was employed as lyrics for an art song written by Samuel Barber and a popular choral piece composed by Morten Lauridsen. In both musical settings, each of their individual titles were derived from the same first line of text: "Sure on this Shining Night".

to twirl uncontrollably and accelerate into endless, three-hundred-sixty-degree swirls. For an entire mile down the steep grade, our path was sealed in solid ice.

Immediately realizing our danger, everyone in the back seat of the car began to cry out in panic. I had no idea how to maneuver us along this treacherous way. If the car slid off any of the curves below, we would plummet and crash into a deep, rocky gully. At that moment, there seemed to be no hopeful solution to our dilemma.

Yet, in that same moment, my entire body became magnetized in a great surge of serenity. Unseen hands seemed to slip into my own and took charge of driving the car. My arms began to blur before me as they propelled the steering wheel quickly to the left, to the right, and then immediately back to the left again. Over and over, I thrust the wheel this way and then shoved it that way. The car continued to spin faster and faster. It was completely out of control.

Nevertheless, every time I thought we would fly off each of the approaching curves, my magnetized hands made some distinctly bizarre manipulations with the steering wheel. These peculiar gestures constantly corrected the direction of the vehicle. They forever compelled us back into the road while we continued our wildly quickening spin down the mountainside.

As we faced the final leg of our riotous descent, I realized that the only way to complete safety was by crossing a narrow concrete bridge at the bottom of this steep passage. On both sides of the bridge were sharp and hazardous banks dropping into the gulley. It was impossible to cross the bridge while spinning. Most likely, we would smash repeatedly into its sides or crash through those walls and plummet into the brook below.

Everyone in the car was terribly motion sick. The speed to which we had accelerated and the rate at which the car was twirling was more severe than the most outrageous ride in any amusement park. Needless to say, there was nothing fun or amusing about this predicament.

As we came face-to-face with the bridge, a magnetic sensation consumed my entire body once again. It compelled me to execute uncanny motions with the steering wheel while forcing me to begin continuously tapping on the brake pedal. Suddenly, the car violently broke out of the spin for the first time during the entire ordeal. As I was braking, the wheels must have grabbed on to one, solitary bare spot in the road.

Now the car was finally traveling straight again. However, we continued to slide ever faster towards the concrete wall of the bridge. All of us were bracing for an inevitable impact, when those potent invisible hands took hold of my right leg—coercing me to slam on the brakes

with more power than what was normally within me.

For a fleeting second, this caused the car to gather even more speed. But in the next instant, ice underneath us completely vanished. Although the road still appeared to be coated with that crystalline substance, it was only the sogginess of a mild sleet fallen to earth at our currently lower and warmer altitude. Immediately, a newfound friction on the ground engaged the tires of the car in an unending skid. The concrete barrier was directly ahead of us now and a terrible collision appeared imminent. Yet just before the ensuing moment of impact, the car unexpectedly stopped.

After a brief, breathless silence, all of us began cheering and applauding with enormous relief. I then opened the door and placed my feet reverently on firm ground. Walking completely around the car, I checked to see if any damage had been done during the descent. Miraculously, there wasn't a single scratch anywhere. It was even more of a miracle to discover that there was only a fraction of an inch between the front of the car and the wall of the bridge. Not even my little finger could fit between the two surfaces!

These incidents from my life might appear extraordinary or even implausible to some. Regardless, they were not isolated happenings. Hundreds of similar events occurred throughout the years and the odd sensation of having formless, magnetized hands guide my eyes to focus on something in my line of sight that was crucial for me to see at the moment was present in a substantial number of these profound experiences. I endlessly pondered the question over the years whether or not said situations were just a stream of flukes or anomalies? Yet how could they be when they were so commonplace throughout my entire life?

Because of the passionate faith of my grandmother and others in the family, I was taught well an ardent belief in the miraculous. But because of horrendous circumstances that also seemed to entangle or enslave many of my relatives frequently, I likewise inherited the ability to practice unconsciously a belief in the inevitability of disaster, tragedy, poverty, and illness.

Until I was almost twenty, my father often would make this harsh and abrupt pronouncement to his three children any time that he and my mother would leave us at home by ourselves:

No matches! No knives! No guns!

And though I truly believe that he knew none of us had even the slightest inclination of fiddling with any such implements (aside from the fact that his couple of hunting rifles were locked

away and never used), his fear-ridden litany nevertheless resonated obsessively throughout the house at frequent intervals. I have always felt that his irrational lectures were due to a series of tragic accidents happening in his own childhood, and he must have been terrified of having to relive those heartbreaks again.

Aside from this particular preoccupation of his, both my father and my mother constantly harped at us about getting sick. They each had experienced life-threatening illnesses in their own lives so they constantly scolded us with excessive fervor (and usually without any provocation whatsoever) concerning our not dressing warmly enough, wanting to open a window for a little fresh air, or any number of things that other parents would encourage their children to do rather than prohibit them.

This is just one example of their common rants along these lines:

> Do this or you are going to be sick…
>
> Do that or you are going to be sick…
>
> You are going to be sick!
>
> You are going to be sick!!
>
> You are going to be sick!!!

In fact, on countless occasions, I have been subjected to that lethal litany dozens of times daily.

Even though I constantly endeavored to do what my parents asked of me, their frequent, fanatical fixation on always becoming sick (compounded by a pervasive fear about the abstract idea of *sickness* itself) could be at least one reason for my continuous struggle with numerous, severe illnesses throughout my entire childhood and much of my adult life. After all, it wasn't just an individual practice of focusing upon these thoughts that manifested my *reality*, but group practice of members of the family assisted in manifesting that *reality* as well.[56]

Were the conditions of my life (mentioned throughout this chapter) extraordinary, average, exciting, tedious, blessed, or cursed? This type of question is inconsequential here. The only important thing to recognize is that each situation in anyone's existence is solely a materialization of both individual and group thinking. This occurs regardless of how we might

[56] It is important to note that I mention this not to lay blame on my parents for my past illnesses but only to record what actually had transpired. They simply did what most of us tend to do. They reacted to their circumstances with the thoughts and beliefs that were taught to them by others and also with the thoughts and beliefs they chose to continue practicing; and their choices to practice further equally were determined by other thoughts and beliefs already well-practiced and deeply ingrained.

label any situation or condition, and regardless of whether our practices (essential to the existence of any situation or condition) were implemented consciously or unconsciously, consistently or inconsistently, correctly or incorrectly, completely or incompletely. Perhaps the only valid question to ask about every circumstance is:

> *Are all our current thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions now manifesting in a state of complete balance, oneness, and divine love?*

VI.

Practicing perfection and other exceptional conclusions…

To further understand the relationship between practice and outcomes affecting all our endeavors, it is vital to speak of mastery. In the book *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell, the author quotes the neurologist Daniel Levin while addressing how mastery is a key to any form of success in our lives.

> "The emerging picture…is that ten thousand hours of practice is required to achieve the level of mastery associated with being a world-class expert—in anything," writes the neurologist, Daniel Levin. "In study after study, of composers, basketball players, fiction writers, ice skaters, concert pianists, chess players, master criminals, and what have you, this number comes up again and again. Of course, this doesn't address why some people get more out of their practice sessions than others do. But no one has yet found a case in which true world-class expertise was accomplished in less time. It seems that it takes the brain this long to assimilate all that it needs to know to achieve mastery." [57]

[57] In numerous radio and television interviews to which I have listened, critics of the ten-thousand hour rule for mastery regularly made use of only a portion of Gladwell's quoting Daniel Levin's research findings. Obviously, this was done to

Gladwell adds, "This is true even of people we think of as prodigies". Yet, the reason why there are those who achieve greater benefits from their practice than others, is that some utilize more effective and complete techniques in their practice. Even when we attempt to master a single endeavor, a multitude of *sub-practices* are occurring, whether or not we are aware of them. The answer to Levin's observation—that the effectiveness of practice results vary from person to person—lies with how many of these underlying practices does each individual carry out consciously, consistently, correctly, and completely within the required ten thousand hours to achieve mastery.

Physical, mental, emotional, and even spiritual levels need to be engaged while perfecting any activity. This includes an understanding, utilization, and adaptation to both our genetic advantages and liabilities.[58] The more awareness and understanding of proper technique that is applied to each level of practice, the more effective our results will be. An illustration of this is that the upshot of every musician learning how to control and relax muscular responses while performing differs greatly. Consequently, some will perform with more efficacy than others. This also is true with the practice of emotional responses, hand-eye coordination, concentration,

---

validate their own assertions. They stated that many people take much longer than ten thousand hours to achieve mastery, and some never will be able to achieve it—regardless of how long they continue to practice. However, they repeatedly omitted the following portion of the Levin excerpt that implies basically the same thing:

> Of course, this doesn't address why some people get more out of their practice sessions than others do. But no one has yet found a case in which true world-class expertise was accomplished in less time. It seems that it takes the brain this long to assimilate all that it needs to know to achieve mastery.

One interviewer asked his guest that if he (the interviewer) practiced for ten-thousand hours, could he be guaranteed winning an Olympic gold medal. The guest clearly answered with an emphatic "No" while pointing out the invalidity of the ten-thousand hour rule. However, mastery does not connote winning any sort of medal. How could anyone say that if we lost winning an Olympic prize by .009 seconds (for example) that our accomplishments would not be considered masterful nonetheless? There are countless other factors that comprise winning or losing such competitive events: physical, mental, and emotional health issues; injuries; emotional and material support of family and friends; training techniques; training facilities; equipment; coaching techniques; corporate financial support; corporate agendas and ensuing pressure; political support or interference; distractions and disruptions by (and from) media coverage; etc.

Also, there are many world-class masters who never make it to the international stage at all. Illness, lack of financial stability and/or funding, lack of opportunities to launch a career, lack of moral support from family and friends, and even the unwillingness to live out of a suitcase are just a few of the reasons to hinder or prevent worldwide renown. Other possible causes are the unwillingness to travel endlessly, to be forced to eat whatever food is available, to lose a great deal of personal life and the accompanying emotional security, or simply because universal recognition is not wanted or desired. There are many other important reasons for not achieving that sort of celebrity. However, we now are speaking of acclaim and notoriety rather than mastering any of the aforementioned pursuits such as supreme artistry, intellectual or spiritual illumination, or athletic perfection. The mastery of fame is not a topic that will be discussed at this time.

It is essential to address one final point. We also must not confuse the mastery of a sport, an art form, a scientific discipline, or all other areas of expertise (for that matter) with subsequent financial success or failure. Wealth and monetary gain—or lack thereof—are outcomes founded on entirely different sets of practices and masteries. Granted, perfecting any particular endeavor certainly can lead to fame and fortune but must not be mistaken for them nor substituted by them.

[58] Refer to Chapter 4, Section X: "Beyond all training of our unique and separate selves". This section can be found starting on page 453 and provides a further discussion on group practices, especially within those paragraphs concerning any group thoughts and practices we share with our ancestors that manifest in (and due to) our genetic makeup.

digital dexterity, flexibility, speed, accuracy, musical interpretation, sensitivity, the belief that we can or cannot accomplish the task at hand, and countless other practices on multiple levels—including the adaptation of techniques maximizing our genetic assets and compensating for any genetic liabilities. They are all crucial to any masterful performance.

Do extraneous thoughts and emotions distract us while we practice? They can become a part of our overall rehearsal routines if we allow those disruptions to arise continuously. Have we learned to effectively correct inaccuracies or do they continue as we proceed with our practicing? If we allow errors to recur throughout practice, then the results certainly will be less successful; and mistakes actually become incorporated into subsequent practice and even part of any final outcome.

To get a better idea of what ten thousand hours of practice actually entails, we might think of it as five years of eight-hour daily practices (five days per week) or five years of nearly six-hour daily practices (seven days per week). Then we must imagine that each of those six- or eight-hour practices is dedicated to only one activity—with no breaks and no interruptions. Breaks certainly can be taken but cannot be counted as part of the practice. We must think of doing this pursuit for a minimum of five years without cessation and with no vacations included as part of that five-year practice period. This amount of dedicated practice time would produce a possible beginning for mastery, not its culmination. The height of mastery could take decades more of similar practice. However, considerably less daily practice time might be required as practice itself can reach an ultimate state of excellence and efficiency over time.

Students occasionally would complain to me after having practiced something repeatedly still without being able to achieve the desired results. Frequently, I responded to their protests by recounting one of my favorite stories. Actually, it might not be entirely accurate or it could simply be an urban legend with little or no truth in it at all. Nevertheless, it always made a lasting impression with every student:

> During his younger years, the great concert pianist Vladimir Horowitz was reported to follow a specific rule while practicing. Whenever he had trouble with any passage in the music he was learning, he would repeat that passage a hundred times. If he made a single mistake during those recurrent practices (even if it were a part of the final repetition), he would begin another hundred repetitions and start that phase of his practice all over again.

Although I wasn't aware of the ten thousand hour rule until more recently, the point I wished to convey to my students was that if the amount of correct repetition didn't achieve a desired effect, then additional correct repetitions were required. Regardless, too much repetition in any endeavor is never correct and always counterproductive. Fatigue and lack of concentration eventually surface. When such a thing arises, practice will likely be unconscious, inconsistent, incorrect, and incomplete. This type of practice (even during the ten-thousand-hour quest for mastery) will not produce a desirable outcome. Pacing and focus are indispensable in making all practice conscious, consistent, correct, and complete—thereby creating a condition of true oneness and balance.

Obviously, when Daniel Levin spoke of achieving mastery in no less than ten thousand hours, he referred to various vocations requiring great skill and expertise. Despite this, it could also have relevance regarding other types of training—including the practice of any thought, idea, emotion, intention, belief, or action. Ten thousand hours of practice is not necessarily the magic formula for mastering the processes required to transform thought into physical reality. However, it does suggest that concentrated, long-term practice will produce incredible results in anything. I suggest that not only does persistent practice manifest results, but it actually can result in multifaceted forms of manifestation. And once again, I must reiterate that this will transpire whether or not we practice consciously or unconsciously, consistently or inconsistently, correctly or incorrectly, and completely or incompletely.

Consider how many hours of our lives have been spent practicing thoughts and emotions that never benefit anyone or anything. Have we expended enough time practicing procrastination, laziness, dishonesty, fear, worry, envy, guilt, jealousy, vindictiveness, rage, or even hate to achieve mastery in manifesting those weeds within our garden? What dualistic thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions have been practiced repeatedly and unconsciously for so long that they could pass the ten thousand hour rule? Are we becoming masters of sadness or joy, cruelty or kindness, greed or generosity? What are the ramifications of mastering the best and the worst, greatness and failure, earthly dichotomies and the oneness of divinity? What are the consequences regarding the practice of all personal and group thoughts generated from each individual being and the entire human race as a collective?

Our mortal condition, planet earth, and the known and unknown universes are an outgrowth of every dualistic and non-dualistic practice ever conceived consciously or unconsciously. This is what we have sown, fertilized, germinated, and brought to fruition since

the beginning of time. Metaphorically speaking, this includes all that has resulted from our subconscious quest to reclaim the tree of life for our garden. Yet, hindering that pursuit always has been our unending addiction to fruit found upon the Tree of Good and Evil.

Regardless of the number of endeavors we have perceived as being mastered during our time here on earth, what true benefit have they offered us? Regardless of how many endeavors we have spent ten thousand hours practicing (or one hundred thousand hours, or even a half-million hours),[59] what have we actually gained? Without awakening love in all that we practice, what have we truly mastered?

> If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.[60]

Is this to say that each great achievement of the most extraordinary individuals of our race proves to be meaningless? Certainly, this is not the case. However, without mastering love and correctly infusing it into all other forms of so-called *mastery*, there is only one true conclusion concerning these accomplishments. All who achieve these other masteries without love must forever continue to wrestle with success and failure, triumph and disaster, vanity and humility, life and death, good and evil. While always striving for what seems to remain unattainable to them—never perfectly balanced, fully whole, or completely one—they perpetually struggle with endless opposites while bouncing back and forth on that perilously capricious seesaw of duality.

Nevertheless, we now awaken. We now become aware of entering the garden through forgotten gates that were lost to us. We now rise up from sleeping among weeds that no longer can hide the essence of this garden. With newfound awareness, we may offer ourselves a moment of exceptional clarity. It is a supreme moment of infinite possibility. It is an opportunity for rebirth. Yet, if we accept this awakening, we shall be required immediately to engage in the responsibilities of attentive, mindful gardening; and by so doing, we will accept the challenge

[59] The total number of hours comprised in nearly fifty-seven years.

[60] From the New Testament, I Corinthians 13, verses 1–3.

of rediscovering and nurturing the seeds of divine attributes in all that exists.

- Chapter 3 -

An Unholy Trinity of Weeds

I.

"In the name of time, distance,[1] and space,[2] Amen..."[3]

Each moment of every day, we promote and sustain time by evaluating the entirety of our existence in relationship to past, present, and future. Simultaneously, we fabricate distance in time by isolating and quantifying every action and event with all others that precede and follow. Our thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, dreams, and wishes also are assessed in the same manner. Moments, seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, decades, lifetimes, centuries, millenniums, and eons are just some measuring tools with which we gauge the distances between everything in time.

Space is a seemingly invisible barrier dividing, delineating, and singling out all that we perceive around us. We utilize distance in space to further these separations by measuring them in a wide variety of ways. Inches, feet, centimeters, yards, meters, furlongs, kilometers, miles, and light-years are just a few of those measurements we use. At my side, on that end of the room, over there, just around the corner, across the galaxy, and a long way from home are some of the more imprecise ways we express and measure distance in space.

---

[1] Although much of current science refers to the material universe in regards to *space-time* (brought about by Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity), this chapter must deal with space and time separately for illustration purposes—and also with the inherent distances validated and reinforced by our measurements defining them.

[2] "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" is widely used as a part of Christian litanies. This phrase often begins and/or ends various portions of liturgy employed by most denominations embracing Trinitarianism—the belief that the single, Christian God exists simultaneously as three beings: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. With no disrespect (especially, since I have always been a Christian myself), the above wordplay on this phrase is intended to establish an ironic tone for the forthcoming discussion.

[3] *Amen* is used as a pronouncement of verity. It also is employed as an affirmation of manifestation. In Christianity it has come to mean "verily, verily" or "in truth". The Arabic form *Amin* translates literally as "so be it" and is used in the Islamic faith. As indicated by Talmudic scripture, Judaic homiletics refers to Amen as an acronym for "El melekh ne' eman" or "God, trustworthy King". Possibly originating from the name of an Egyptian god *Amun-Ra*, there also are unsubstantiated claims by some Hindu writers that *Amen* and *Amin* came from the Sanskrit word *Aum*. According to *Wikipedia*:

> When taken letter by letter, A-U-M represents the divine energy (Shakti) united in its three elementary aspects: Brahma Shakti (creation), Vishnu Shakti (preservation) and Shiva Shakti (liberation, and/or destruction).

Throughout our entire lives, we unconsciously practice reinforcing an unfaltering belief and subsequently an indissoluble reality in the most deceptive of threesomes: time, distance, and space. There are perhaps no offspring of duality that are more insidious than this diabolical trio. They dictate to us most (or all) of our perceptions about truth. They feed our senses with constant and infinite fabrications of appraisal and judgment. We assess everything in relationship to this misleadingly benign and omnipresent triumvirate and unconditionally accept the restrictions and limitations it puts before us.

Time, distance, and space obscure reality. They are not definers of the authentic as we often believe them to be. Instead, these ambiguous constructs prevent our recognizing that which we really are. Prohibiting absolute balance, oneness, and divine love from filling our awareness, they confound each one of our senses with illusions of their endless boundaries, demarcations, and separations. Yet, we nearly worship and deify this unholy trinity of weeds with unquestioning faith. Such an adamant reliance blinds us from experiencing the veritable nature of that which is both the garden around us and the garden within.

We are so imbedded in their illusions that even while writing these pages, I must succumb to utilizing them. For example, if we actually practiced oneness would it be necessary to distinguish between *the garden around us* and *the garden within*? Only when we are clouded by hallucinations of space and the distance measuring that space, would we need to differentiate anything in this manner. However, to understand why our lives are so saturated with such delusion, it is impossible not to incorporate dualistic descriptions as points of reference. With this kind of orientation, we should be able to identify, comprehend, and remove each phantom perception from our existence more readily.

Because passing from chronological moment to moment and moving from one point in space to another are status quo in this temporal/spatial mirage, we operate in a state of continual judgment regarding these shifts. There is almost a reflexive need to evaluate everything sensorially perceptible to us while we travel through the distances of time and space; and we cling to all that is deemed to be desirable or true for the moment, equally shunning and battling with everything that we proclaim to be undesirable or false. An inestimable number of duplicate or similar cosmic seesaws (still more dualities) occur automatically as we practice our certainty in these ever-shifting judgments.

Continually causing and maintaining disruption, craving, dissatisfaction, worry, and instability in our lives, these dichotomous, seesawing replicas toss us into the regrets and

traumas of our past. They thrust us towards innumerable yearnings and fears of the future. We covet what someone has over here and despise what someone else has over there.

Time, distance, and space seduce us with endless, contrived stratagems. The moment we allow ourselves to be tempted into living and experiencing these deceptions, we practice validating the existence of ultimate artifice. We become the perpetuators of every conceivable and inconceivable seesaw of the duplicitous. We sow the seeds of war and peace, dominance and slavery, loyalty and betrayal—and all other dualities.

Why do we give so much credibility to that which has no constancy? If we reflect on the genuine nature of time by closely examining everything past, present, and future, it quickly becomes apparent that all we trust about time is an elusive, ever-altering shadow of what might actually be real. Physicist Albert Einstein[4] reflected upon this topic when he said:

> …the distinction between past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.[5]

For example, how much time passes before what transpires in the present becomes part of the past? Sometimes we think of the present as what we experience in one day. At other times, we might perceive it as being an hour or an afternoon. But is it actually a minute, a second, a millisecond, or even a microsecond? In one instant, we judge our relationship to the present by a situation that lasts for three hours. Yet in another instant, we view the present through something that affects us for five seconds alone.

There is nothing definite about the present, past, or future. We tend to think of them unconsciously in vague, fluctuating generalities. Our beliefs and judgments about a single moment in our lives can diverge radically and continuously while we pass through the illusion of time.

Whenever a present moment ends, no matter how large or small we conceive that moment to be, it immediately must become part of a continually-changing past. Simultaneously, the future is adjusted endlessly while it merges with the so-called present.

Perhaps we experience a wonderful morning but have a horrible afternoon. As we pass through that day, depending on how much of it we recognize to be the present, we might judge it as brilliant, atrocious, confusing, serene, or with countless other labels. If our perceptions are

[4] Albert Einstein (1879–1955) was a physicist born in the Kingdom of Württemberg, part of the German Empire. He won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1921 and is widely known for his profound and lasting influence upon science.

[5] Einstein purportedly wrote this only weeks before he died in 1955.

affected by other current events, past episodes, possible future occurrences, or our ever-swinging thoughts and feelings about any of those incidents, then what we believe to be our reality in time and space—by way of all of the distances from which we observe and/or through which we travel—can never remain consistent.

Regardless of these changes, we regularly cling to our shifting judgments of past, present, and future happenings as though they were immutable. Paradoxically, we give complete credence to them, even as our perspective continues to modify moment by moment.

While we examine the space surrounding us, nothing in that space stays the same. Yet, without reason, our judgment often ignores these modifications and remains fixed on prior appraisals. While everyone and everything that exists in our sphere of awareness appears to be growing stronger, weaker, healthier, sicker, larger, smaller, fatter, skinnier, sexier, more prudish, prettier, uglier, older, more youthful, kinder, crueler, more loving, more hateful, greedier, more generous, more valuable, or less valuable (due partially to the constant, interconnecting influence that time and space have on one another), our prior assessments often stay the same. But in contrasting moments we can alter any or all of our beliefs based on just one of these changes.

Let us suppose that we are bound to the floor of a prison cell for the entirety of our lives. Despite this seemingly stationary bondage, we most likely wouldn't occupy a single position in space for more than an instant. As our tiny planet spins and tilts its way around the sun, as the solar system travels through the galaxy, and as the galaxy progresses through an ever-expanding universe, what are the chances that we actually visit the same astronomical point more than once?

Even if we realize that everything constant in our existence is an illusion, we still practice beliefs reinforcing those illusions. When we reevaluate our perceptions and adapt our beliefs to adjusted judgments, this conviction in time, distance, and space produces only more duality and more weeds. If we were to examine our state of affairs logically, then we would be forced to conclude that this well-practiced certainty of time, distance, and space yokes us perennially in a condition of genuine illogic and imbalance.

How can we see the oneness of everything (the true nature of this garden) while our beliefs have conjured these three pervasive mechanisms that divide and delineate the entire sum of all realities—such insidious devices eternally manifesting separateness even as an opposite to challenge oneness? In each of its weedy complexities, this dualistic seesaw of

oneness and separateness prevents us from discovering true unity in all that is: the divine attribute of oneness.

How much of our lives is spent practicing the existence of time, distance, and space; and how much of the life of humanity throughout history has been spent practicing the existence of time, distance, and space? If we again consider Daniel Levin's ten thousand hour rule of mastery for each individual's practice, then imagine what masterful manifestations could occur from billions (or even trillions) of individuals throughout history spending each of their entire lifetimes practicing the same belief? Surely we have invested so much of ourselves in relying upon these concepts to be the foundation of all reality that perhaps the only possible outcome from this species-wide group practice is near-total mastery. All of us have been endlessly (and masterfully) materializing and perpetuating this ultimate illusion in our world.

For centuries our philosophers, poets, prophets, and other influential personalities have reminded us to perpetuate our belief in this deceptive trinity of contrived reality. Over two thousand years ago, Aristotle made a bleak observation about the seemingly inescapable influence through which time controls and condemns all of us to aging and obscurity:

> Time crumbles things; everything grows old under the power of Time and is forgotten through the lapse of Time.

Playwright Tennessee Williams further strengthens our belief in time, while fusing it together indelibly with space (and its distances) in an unforgettable quote from his dramatic masterpiece *The Glass Menagerie*:

> Time is the longest distance between two places.

II.

Rudimentary leaps out of temporal and spatial reality...

During my youth, I had countless recurring dreams. Over the course of several years, one of these dreams transpired hundreds of times. There were numerous occasions when it would repeat itself over and over again in a single night. Even though it played out so many times, the details never changed. I recounted this story to several family members and friends because it disturbed and confused me. No one could fathom what the dream meant or why it came to me so often. It troubled almost everyone I told, and some began to judge me harshly and questioned my mental health. Because I received no comfort or understanding by relating this experience to others, I quickly discontinued speaking of it to anyone.

The dream always began in the same manner. Each of my family members and I appeared to be older than we actually were at the time. I was in the back seat of our car with my brother and sister while my parents were sitting in the front seat. We just had arrived at my maternal grandparents' farm. There were numerous cars already parked in front of the house. While dreaming, I seemed to be able to recognize each car that was there. But once I awakened, it perplexed me that many of those same cars were actually unfamiliar. I couldn't even identify my parents' car. It too was unknown to me.

When my family traveled long distances, all of us occasionally played a game in which we would identify the makes, models, and years of every vehicle that passed us on the highway. I was a very proficient player of this game and could name nearly any car I spotted. This made my unfamiliarity with cars in the dream even more mystifying to me. I remember describing to others that the appearance of some of those cars seemed to be somewhat futuristic.

As a child I spent a great deal of time at my grandparents' house and was always excited and happy when my family went to visit them. Yet, in the beginning of this dream, everyone in our car was abnormally somber.

While I opened the car door to disembark, my mother handed me bags of rolls and biscuits, and a large box containing a homemade chocolate cake. With my arms full of freshly-baked treats, I walked briskly ahead of the rest of the family. My sister and brother came next, and my parents followed behind. What was unusual about our parade into the house was that

all of us were dressed very formally. This almost never occurred when we came to see my grandparents.

Another oddity of the dream was that my mother was assisting my father while he walked. He was leaning on a cane and limped along with great effort. During all the years this dream visited me, my father actually never had a problem such as this.

As soon as I went through the back door, I headed to the kitchen to deposit all that I was carrying. The house was filled with the wonderful aromas of my grandmother's cooking. Once in the kitchen, I could see that all the tables and counters were filled with an endless array of tasty dishes. Obviously, this was part of the preparation for a large celebration.

My grandmother, my great aunt, and one of several aunts were busily preparing dinner. They immediately ceased what they were doing to greet me with warm words, hugs, and kisses. What appeared odd about these gestures was that they were carried out with extraordinary sadness. My aunt's eyes were filled with tears and grief. Reticently, I asked them where I should put all that I was holding. My great aunt smiled weakly and pointed to the top of one of the refrigerators at the far side of the room.

After I crossed the kitchen to the other side, and as I began to reach above the refrigerator door, I noticed a pastry box that already was perched there. This carton had an unfamiliar logo on its side. The moment I saw the unknown design, my body froze and an enormous dread came over me. I gasped; and at that same moment, I awoke from the dream. Overwhelmed with great sorrow I couldn't comprehend, I sobbed uncontrollably.

Month after month, year after year, this cryptic scenario haunted my dreams over and over again. The details never varied. They continued to torment me with their inexplicable particulars, making no sense either to me or to anyone with whom I shared this account. After years of being plagued by its endless replays, one night they finally acted out in my mind for the last time. After that, the dream suddenly discontinued—never revisiting me again.

Nonetheless, for many months I wondered if it would ever return, and I continued to ponder over its numerous implications. Eventually, this unanswered riddle faded from the forefront of my thoughts until I rarely reflected upon it at all.

However, about two years later, one of my uncles passed away. In the interim (between the last night I experienced the dream and the day of my uncle's funeral), my father had a nearly-fatal accident. He then endured a subsequent surgery that left him with significant brain damage and semi-paralysis. By the time my uncle died, my father was barely walking again.

With great difficulty, he hobbled more than he walked; and he did so only with the assistance of a leg brace and a cane.

After my uncle's burial, everyone returned to my grandparents' house for dinner. We arrived in a car that we didn't own during the years when I was dreaming continually about this. It had been purchased more recently. As in the dream, we were properly dressed for a funeral.

When I entered my grandmother's kitchen, the aunt whose face was reddened and stained by tears was the wife of my deceased uncle. The pastry box that was on top of the refrigerator had been purchased at a new supermarket nearby. That massive food chain didn't exist during the period when the dream persisted in my life.

While placing the bags of rolls and biscuits on top of the refrigerator, I noticed the pastry box that was already there. Suddenly, the supermarket's logo on the side of the container captivated my attention. It triggered an unexpected remembrance of my dream, while chilling my entire body and flooding my mind like a wintry wave. In that instant, a sobering thought cut me to the quick. For years I had witnessed repeatedly the last several minutes of my current life. I observed this dramatic future event perhaps over a hundred times in the past.

More than fifteen years after my uncle's funeral, I had another remarkable dream about one of my most beloved piano professors. I studied with him in New York when I was in my early twenties. A few years after I had my last lesson with him, this nocturnal vision visited me in vibrant color. Its vividness was surpassed only by a few other rare (yet unrelated) dreams. To my recollection, it was the only time I had ever dreamt of him. He never appeared to me before or since that night.

In this particular instance, I was stolen away to his upper West Side apartment in Manhattan. This was an elegant space with lofty, elaborately detailed ceilings. The living room was quite splendid and ideal for making music. Two grand pianos were situated at the far end of the room near one of the striking French windows that overlooked 105th Street. The outer facade of the building also was impressive. It was situated in one of the most stately and beautiful blocks between West End Avenue and Riverside Drive.

I was sitting in a large antique chair that normally was in front of the windows and near the piano situated furthest from the main entryway. However, it had been pulled across the entire room to face a couch that rested closer to the dining room and front door. In between this couch and chair was placed a ratty and dilapidated card table that had apparently not seen

better days for many, many years. Nothing in this setting could have been more out of character than that peculiar object. Nevertheless, there it was.

I sat in the chair on one side of the table, and my professor was lying on the couch facing me. He propped up his head with several pillows, and the rest of his body had been covered in blankets. Upon that table was placed a chess board with its pieces on top of it. But the most bizarre part of the dream was that those chess pieces were not set up for playing chess. They were being used to play checkers instead!

There we stayed for the duration of the dream playing checkers with chess pieces, boisterously bantering back and forth with each other (uttering nothing but total nonsense) and filling the room with riotous laughter.

Through this entire episode I experienced only one emotion. It was absolute joy. Our laughter seemed as though it would never end. Yet, considering that our actual relationship—fond though it be—was still relatively formal, this unexpected interaction could be described as nothing less than exultant.

Yet, in the midst of our revelry, I awoke unexpectedly and seemed to be forcibly jolted into an upright position in bed. After reaching over to a side table to turn on the light, a magnetic energy suddenly surrounded my head. It clasped my skull firmly and I felt the familiar sensation of being directed by a pair of invisible hands. They firmly guided my vision towards the far right. I acutely became aware of a large clock on the wall. As I observed the precise hour and minute, a resounding voice simultaneously spoke out the time to me as well. Instantly, I burst into tears without knowing why.

The next afternoon I received a call from a friend with whom I hadn't spoken for months. He wanted to tell me that my professor had passed away in the middle of the night and mentioned when the memorial service would take place.

Before the service I went to my professor's apartment to speak with his wife. She also was a former teacher of mine and a well-loved friend. There were several people with her at the time, but I was fortunate to speak with her privately for a few moments. I told her that I had had a very unusual dream about her husband on the night of his passing. On a few earlier occasions, she already had been introduced to several of my inexplicable (and seemingly mystical) experiences and quickly came to respect them. Eagerly she looked straight into my eyes, nodded and said:

Please come back after the memorial. We will be able to talk for about an hour before

everyone arrives for the reception. I am anxious to know what happened.

As soon as I returned for our appointed visit, we sat down together and I recounted the entire dream in detail. While I spoke, her eyes opened wider and wider. When I mentioned waking up and being compelled to observe the time, her mouth dropped and she cried out. Then she looked at me in astonishment and exclaimed that this was the most incredible thing she had ever heard.

Immediately, she got up from her chair, took me by the hand (something which she had never done before or since), and asked me to follow her into the dining room. As we faced an enormous antique china cabinet, she reached behind it and pulled out an extremely shabby card table. Of course, it was identical to the one I saw in the dream.

When I described the table to her earlier, I saw that she was becoming increasingly excited. Now she exclaimed her certainty that I couldn't have possibly seen it before. She then added:

> This old thing was never allowed out of its hiding place when guests or students were in the house.

After a few moments she continued to speak:

> My husband was lying on the couch all evening. It's the same couch you saw in your dream. We thought it might be nice to play a game, so I brought out the card table from the dining room. Then I dragged that comfortable chair across the room so I could sit facing him.

At this juncture, she pointed to the chair I also mentioned earlier and continued almost awestricken in a very low voice:

> First we thought it would be fun to play cards, but I knew he was too weak to hold anything in his hands. I decided that we should do something that wouldn't overtax him. Finally, we settled on checkers. I left the room to find the set, but returned only with chess pieces and a game board.
>
> I wanted to tell him that I would continue looking for the checkers, but he had already begun to doze off. Then I left the board and chess set on the table and went upstairs again to search a little while longer.

> Soon after, I became very tired and decided to take a nap. But instead of a nap, I fell into a deep sleep; and after several hours passed, I suddenly woke up with a great sense of urgency. Something compelled me to look at the clock, and I immediately rushed downstairs to check on him. The moment I entered the living room, he opened his eyes, smiled at me, said "I love you", and then he was gone.

After she finished telling me her story, she looked at me with tears in her eyes and said:

> I gasped when you were telling me about your dream, because the time that you observed on the clock when you awoke was the same exact time I noticed moments before he died.

I smiled at her and replied gently:

> Just remember, he did play checkers after all; and he seemed to be having the time of his life!

At this time, I now wish to recount the following story. It illustrates yet another episode from my life when a sense of timeless wonder appeared to intervene upon this world of *ordinary* times, distances, and spaces.

Following my father's nearly-fatal accident in 1963, he was left permanently disabled for the remaining thirty-eight years of his life. Despite an abrupt and premature end to the brief time he spent operating a small business, many of his achievements were remarkable nonetheless. The precision, ingenuity, and artistry in all that he accomplished were obvious to anyone who knew his handiwork. Although he taught himself nearly everything he knew, his unwavering conviction, discipline, and obsessive dedication yielded results often praised and envied by many formally-trained competitors in the field.

Among other things, he was an extraordinary gardener and landscaper. When I was young, he often would take me to some of the grand manor houses where he worked. On those great estates he was responsible for the upkeep of extensive lawns and formal gardens. In numerous cases, he designed and constructed those magnificent grounds himself.

While wandering through these vast creations, I remember thinking what fantastical worlds he had made with his own hands. Frequently, I felt as though I had gone down Alice's rabbit hole[6] and found myself in Wonderland. Whenever he fashioned anything, he did it with

[6] As described by Lewis Carroll in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, published in 1865.

the precision of a perfectionist. Even in adulthood, I sometimes found my way back to a few of those estates where I again found myself meandering through astonishingly beautiful gardens. Although—in most cases—they never were so beautiful as when my father was caring for them.

Throughout his youth, he taught himself numerous skills and crafts. So when he began the ambitious project of landscaping grounds and constructing a house from scratch, he employed many of those self-acquired skills while building our beautiful home in a rural, northeastern suburb of New York. Unfortunately, he never completed this project by himself, because of the tragic accident that drastically changed the course of his life forever.

Nonetheless, the dream of providing a wonderful home for his wife and children soon did come to fruition. Thanks to generous contributions and efforts from members of the local volunteer fire department (to which my father belonged) and also from family members and friends, the house he began to build suddenly took shape and came to a rapid completion. This occurred during a series of weekends, when dozens of people took up hammers, saws, and paint brushes—completing our home in the fashion of an old-time house-raising.

Also during this massive, communal effort to finish the construction in just a few dozen hours, there was an endless supply of food and drink on hand; and even now, I vividly remember those house-building parties as some of the happiest memories from my younger life.

Aside from his practical skills, my father had a sensitive and artistic aspect to his personality. From the time when I was very little until I was just reaching my teens (before his accident occurred), I remember him doodling wonderful drawings of houses and of intricate, penciled-in landscapes.

But I especially recollect how much I loved his ability to sketch caricatures of almost anyone. He had an exceptional knack for identifying the physical and emotional idiosyncrasies in any personality and could encapsulate all of them in a simple but sophisticated portrait.

Although he was undemonstrative and unassuming, my father had great physical and spiritual strength, bolstered by his unwavering perseverance and moral conviction as well. In rare moments, he could surprise people with simple statements that revealed his abilities for much compassion and wisdom.

Unfortunately, after his accident and the ensuing surgery in the early 1960s, he was left with considerable brain damage and semi-paralysis. The doctors told my mother that they didn't believe he would live for more than ten years. Additionally, he continued to be challenged again

and again by a never-ending succession of illnesses, accidents, and emotional disasters.

Yet he continued to live for decades. But in that subsequent life, his suffering flourished. He harbored irreparable anguishes and relentless regrets, never knowing how to relinquish any of them. Despite everything, he survived all of it—almost as if he were a great warrior doing timeless battle with every dualistic force in the universe.

Perhaps the greatest of his sorrows and tragedies came to him near the end of his life. As he lay in an adjoining bed in the nursing home, he watched helplessly while his beloved and loyal wife of well-over fifty years, my dear mother spent an ultimate, eternal night of screaming, convulsions, and agonizing pain before she passed the next day on September 1st of 2001.

A few hours after her death, my father and I sat quietly together. He began to speak to me once more about wanting to die, about how horrible things had been throughout his entire life. I agreed that he suffered greatly and reassured him that he would leave at the right time, assuring him that it would be soon enough.

Then I added that it really was important not to cling to the bad memories. It was essential not to hold on to sorrow and all other underlying, negative emotions when it was time to leave this earth. Instead, it was vital to feel and express gratitude and remember the wonderful things that happened in life, taking only them on the day of passing.

Even though he was heavily medicated, overwhelmed by grief, and (as always) a man of few words, his eyes suddenly began to sparkle. He proceeded to talk to me for over two hours without stopping, more than he ever had done during his entire life. He spoke coherently and even articulately of all the great, beautiful, and wondrous events that he experienced throughout his seventy-four years of living.

He spoke about all the things for which he had to be thankful: his family and friends. Especially, there were his children, his beloved Alice, and the beautiful homes they shared together. Then he spoke of countless, happy stories from his past, many of which even I had forgotten completely.

Three-and-a-half months later my father also died. On December 15, 2001 (several hours after his passing), I felt a need to occupy myself with mundane tasks. It seemed like a good idea to begin preparing my home for Christmas. But before commencing with these seasonal chores, I turned on the CD player so that some of my favorite music might console me while I worked.

After spending hours trimming and pruning a beautiful, nine-foot balsam, I climbed onto

a step ladder to begin hanging ornaments from the highest branches. Just as I was stretching out my arms to adjust the positions of several sparkling silver and glistening gold spheres, a resolute yet peaceful voice called out my name. It resonated above the rich and compelling sonorities of Afro-American spiritual songs—which currently were drifting through every room in the house. I was so startled by this unexpected interruption that I almost fell off the ladder.

When I turned around to see who spoke to me, I realized that my father was standing in the middle of the room; and my mother stood beside him. Understandably, he did exhibit some noticeable weariness. But he also looked exceptionally well and gave the impression of being very happy. Displaying no signs of disability, he appeared as a vibrant, handsome young man once again. My mother also looked absolutely blissful. She seemed more joyous than ever before.

They began speaking to me and expressed much gratitude for the love and support always offered to them by so many. They especially were thankful for those who assisted during these last, difficult days here on earth.

While remaining clearly visible for several minutes, their intangible bodies that once were of flesh and bone exuded an inexorable, mellifluent glow. Their radiance enhanced and magnified the soft streams of light that emanated from countless, star-like illuminations adorning the Christmas tree. Ultimately my parents smiled, waved goodbye, and gently sifted back into an eternal ether where they apparently now reside.

Just as they were departing, the voice of one of my favorite sopranos reclaimed my attention. Her unaccompanied strains rang out familiar words to the song "Amazing Grace". It was as though someone had turned up the volume for me to hear those comforting, final words of synchronicity:

I once was lost but now am found, was bound but now am free.

III.

Surmounting the delusions of day-to-day existence...

There were countless other occasions when circumstances revealed to me the paradoxical nature of time, distance, and space. One of those instances took place a few years after I moved to the White Mountains. I was still renting that wondrous, upland home located nearly ten miles east of the Connecticut River.

It was a bright, frigid New Year's Day. Sparkling sunshine shone through air that was as clean and clear as spotless crystal. An average of eight feet of snow covered the ground, though many mountain-like drifts towered over even that sizable snow base. Normally, I had four steps leading up to my front porch. However, during that winter, it was necessary to dig a path down into the porch from several feet above the stairway.

Many friends would often come to visit so that we could enjoy outdoor activities together. It was a perfect season for sleighing and tobogganing. Incredibly high snow banks piled up against the entire outer-kitchen wall. This made it possible for a sled run to begin near the chimney top. It coursed down the slope of the roof and continued descending along my steep, winding driveway.

Over three feet of fresh snow dropped on the plateau overnight. Early that morning, skies cleared and the temperature plummeted to lower than minus forty degrees.[7] Even by midday, it was still about thirty-five below zero;[8] and this didn't take into account the significant wind chill generated by gusts greater than fifty miles per hour.

Experiencing such severe weather—winter after winter—the ever-present dangers of frostbite and hypothermia were a constant concern. Keeping the body sufficiently warm was essential. This was true not just for comfort, but also for safety and survival. Nonetheless, I lived in a polar paradise that continuously invigorated and inspired me. Yet, without constantly taking proper precautions, freezing to death was always a conceivable ending to any midwinter escapade.

---

[7] The Fahrenheit equivalent to –40 degrees Celsius. (This particular temperature is the only one where both scales give it the same numerical value.)

[8] The Fahrenheit equivalent to –37.22 degrees Celsius.

Regardless of the frigid temperatures, that particular New Year's Day was supremely glorious and bright. I knew it would be a perfect afternoon for snowshoeing, so I quickly dressed myself in dense layers of clothing and wrapped most of my face, my entire neck, and the rest of my head with a long, thick scarf. Once my heavy, hooded parka was zipped up completely, I flung open the front door against a blast of raw Arctic air and slowly began to trudge down our unplowed driveway to the lonely dirt road. It was there where our car had to be parked at that time of year—more than an eighth of a mile below.

Twenty minutes of trekking in snowshoes through deep and *freeze-dried* powder brought me to nearby Lake Armington. I gradually advanced across its ice-covered emptiness while being inundated by turbulent waves of white wind. The blustery weather impelled immeasurable, snowy seas of crystalline spray airborne above the lake. Massive swirls of dazzling snow-dust swept across this sizable stretch like gargantuan, gliding, galloping ghosts. These unearthly leviathans gleamed as they rose and fell about me. Continually expanding and contracting, they forever danced. Their elusive images gyrated in some cosmic collaboration that was vast, vaporous, and phantasmagorical. They regularly dematerialized before my eyes while sifting swiftly back onto the lake's solid surface. Briefly, they would settle upon hundreds of two and three-story-high snow dunes before ferocious, roaring airstreams compelled them skyward once again.

Despite the extreme conditions, this plateau was my home, my refuge, my temple. It embodied all that was inspirational, enlightening, mystifying, and miraculous to me. Frequently, I had visions that not only were exceptional unto themselves, but guided me continuously towards beneficial outcomes. Visitations with saints and angelic beings were commonplace at that time of my life.

Occasionally, I only heard their voices. At other times those mystical entities would appear two-dimensionally in my mind's eye or directly in front of me. Sometimes they would manifest in full form as three-dimensional beings. Whenever they appeared in this manner, their materialization was preceded by several minutes of a conspicuously audible tone.

While I marched over a central portion of the lake, winds suddenly subsided and enormous peace enveloped me. After pausing briefly to view the spectacular vistas in every direction, I fell into deep contemplation. Still in a meditative state I forged ahead once more. As I continued to drag my snowshoes through this icy desert, every ounce of air seemed to pulse and echo with a sweeping, humming resonance.

I began to recognize a familiarity with this sound when unseen hands took a firm, electric hold upon my head—something done to me so many times before and since that day. My forward gaze was coaxed strongly to the left. In astonishment, I nearly fell over when I realized that a luminous figure was silently walking alongside me.

My surprise immediately transformed into joy when I recognized the angelic figure accompanying me across the lake. During the extended decade that included my twenties and early thirties, Saint Francis of Assisi[9] visited me so often that I thought of him more as a dear friend or beloved relation than as some celebrated monk from out of antiquity. In that specific instance, he appeared slightly larger than myself.[10] Although this embodiment certainly was

---

[9] Francesco di Pietro di Bernardone (1182?–1226) was an Italian friar who founded the Franciscan order. The Franciscans were Catholic mendicants dedicated especially to preaching, missions, and charities. (Mendicants are members of a religious order combining monastic life with outside religious activity, originally owning neither personal nor community property.)

[10] My first encounter with Saint Francis came unexpectedly while I was attending my college sophomore year in Baltimore, Maryland. Although I already had an assistant organist/choir director position at a large church in the northern outskirts of the city, I still needed other new sources of income to get by financially during the coming year.

One evening, while I was working at my desk on a music theory assignment, I could hear some of my classmates having an animated discussion in the dorm room next to mine. Since the walls were paper thin, it wasn't difficult for me to discern nearly every word that was being spoken. I could hear one of my friends complaining about a peculiar church where he had been playing the organ for Sunday evening services. He emphatically expressed his desire to resign from the position as soon as possible, but he just didn't know how to get out of his commitment there.

As I continued listening to their conversation, I discovered that his weekend work was located only a couple of blocks from our school. My current church obligations on Sundays were over by early afternoon. Even with the limited bus schedule and my long ride back to the dormitory, I always returned to my room no later than 3 pm.

While I was considering the prospect of being able to make more money at such a convenient and apparently undemanding job post (regardless of how weird it might actually turn out to be), a startling burst of mesmeric energy suddenly shot through every cell in my body. This formidable magnetic force immediately thrust me out of my chair; and within the next few seconds, I found myself facing my friend in the adjoining dorm room. Without any hesitation, I immediately explained how much I needed the extra money and would be happy to take over his role as church organist.

Simultaneously stunned and thrilled by my offer, he giggled with delight and agreed wholeheartedly to introduce me to the minister the next day. After a brief audition with the most enthusiastic clergywoman I had ever met—who also happened to have one of the most radiant and angelic faces I also had ever encountered—she graciously invited me to begin playing for her next service on the following weekend. The musical format for worship there was really straightforward. In fact, there didn't seem to be anything *weird* about it at all. Actually, I found everything to be totally routine until the last fifteen minutes of the service.

In that final segment, the minister invited all of the congregation to join her in silent meditation and prayer. But during those moments of reflection, people also were encouraged to speak aloud when anything inspired might be occurring to them. At first, this part of their worship reminded me of another service that I once attended at a regional *Friends Meeting House*. In any such Quaker meeting, almost the entire time is spent in total silence. The only exception to this was whenever any personal insights might be offered audibly for the benefit of everyone else present in the room. Actually, in both of these circumstances I found the stillness to be unexpectedly comforting and quite stirring as well.

While the congregation persisted in meditating quietly, I continued to remain being seated at the organ (which was situated up against one of the lovely, plastered walls in this simple little chapel). Without warning, a sudden pulsing light began to swirl about me. Within this radiance, waves of the most intense purple, gold, and white rays vibrated directly before my eyes. As I was compelled to move my gaze towards the ceiling, the most incredibly large and serene presence appeared. As soon as this vision took hold, I involuntarily jerked upward in total surprise. Furthermore, I was so startled that both of my knees rose high above the organ bench where I had been seated. Then they immediately smashed forcibly against the base of the keyboard with an audible thud.

After I let out a muted yet pain-filled grunt, the entire congregation was roused by the unexpected commotion I had caused. Then, as though what suddenly had happened to me came as no surprise, several people gently spoke out in unison: "What did you just see?" So taken aback by their undaunted nonchalance and seeming familiarity with such an outburst from their new organist, it took me several moments before I could regain enough composure to reply. Finally,

lifelike and three-dimensional, his current form also seemed translucent and ethereal. Enormous, auric beams radiated outward from his presence and his gentle gaze was illuminated by soft, nimbus-like pulses of a dazzling silver light.

Each of his visits was always timely and unsolicited. His words were forever wise and compassionate. In this specific case, he began speaking to me in an uncharacteristically straightforward manner. The moment I became aware of his presence, he mentioned that I would receive a large sum of money from an unknown sponsor. It was going to occur in exactly one month. During the following year, that same person would present me with a cash gift almost twice as large as the first one. My benefactor already had decided to remain anonymous so as not to pressure me into expressing gratitude or feeling any obligation.

He remarked that another patron would step forward to assist me in two years' time. Apparently, I already knew the person well but wouldn't be able to anticipate who that might be. The amount to be received by this second donor would be twice as large as the first two gifts combined. Suddenly, after offering me many kind words of encouragement, my sainted friend wished me peace. Then, he faded back into the wind.

This unanticipated visitation filled me with happiness, hope, and gratitude. Immediately, I headed back home where a couple of people were waiting and quickly recounted to them what had transpired while I was snowshoeing across the lake. Over the next several days, much anticipation filled all of us—regarding the possible fulfillment of those pronouncements made to me on that arctic afternoon. But gradually our excitement faded and life returned to normal.

However, exactly one month later, on February 1st of that same year, I received an

---

when I did describe the exceptionally unique features of the personage who had just appeared, everyone clapped their hands joyfully, smiled, and nodded in apparent recognition.

At that moment, the minister came over to the organ and reached out to take my hand. Escorting me to a modest shrine on the opposite wall of this little chapel, I gasped when she pointed to a small, framed portrait of a man who was identical to the one who just appeared before my eyes in such complete radiance. She then smiled tenderly and whispered, "Let me introduce you to the patron saint of our church. This is Saint Francis of Assisi."

Although I may have heard of his name in passing, my family handed down to me no knowledge of nor interest in such religious figures. Consequently, once my new minister friend spoke to me of this patron saint, I promptly went to the library the following day to discover more about the incredible being with whom I had surprisingly become acquainted. Since that first encounter, he has continued to visit with me for nearly fifty years.

It was not long after that first encounter when Saint Francis began appearing frequently to me. Even though I greatly revered his presence in my life, cherished every moment when we spoke to one another, and felt as though I were undeserving of such sacred meetings, he simultaneously felt as if he instead were simply my beloved, older brother. Yet at other times, his manifestations seemed more like the presence of a favorite grandfather or great uncle.

Regardless, these materializations always felt as though timelessness embraced the both of us whenever he chose to grace me with his eternal countenance. Whether he gave me simple consolations or comforting advice, healed a current affliction, announced a blessing that I would soon be receiving, or even when he saved my life from sudden and present danger, Saint Francis of Assisi has remained a benevolent and blessed beacon—forever guiding me past the many perilous pitfalls of life.

unexpected letter from a kind acquaintance who hadn't communicated with me since the previous summer. When I eagerly opened the envelope, I noticed that there was a smaller envelope tucked inside. Being tremendously curious about this enclosure, I opened the second one immediately. Inside of it was a lovely card that contained a brief note written to my friend by someone with whom I wasn't familiar. It said:

> Please don't tell him who I am, as I don't want him to feel beholden to me. Just mention that I'm an old lady who admires his poetry.

With that note, a check was enclosed for several thousand dollars.

A year later, I received a second gift from that same person. It nearly was twice the amount of the first one. Another year passed and a student of mine offered me a third gift. Just as my beloved Saint Francis had predicted on that blustery New Year's Day two years prior, this final gift was exactly double the amount of the first two. I never would have imagined receiving such assistance from this student. She was someone who lived very modestly and gave no hint that she had the means to help anyone in such a manner.

The night before finding out that she would be sending me a gift of money in the near future, I happened to be driving home from several days of teaching in New York State. My ride back to the north country was especially serene and idyllic. I felt as though I had entered a pristine, sparkling, star-filled nocturne. Oncoming traffic was almost nonexistent throughout the entirety of that trip, so my senses of sight and sound were heightened by an omnipresent blackness and those resonant singing silences found only within the auspicious quiet hours of certain late-evening drives.

But as I ascended that final, steep, one-mile stretch up to the plateau where I was living, what had been crystal-clear visibility for hours unexpectedly transformed into a dense and blinding fog. While inching through this unexpected, ever-thickening soup, I suddenly began to refocus my thoughts on totally unrelated happenings and found myself questioning how I might resolve the financial crisis currently facing my life. However, no solutions came to mind and almost automatically I started whispering an anxious entreaty for divine intervention.

My internal discourse was taking place while the roadway ahead started to level off nearing the brim of that upper flatland. As my car continued crawling along at a snail's pace, even the low beams from the headlights began to blind me. Their mildly penetrating rays (though initially projecting solely forward and outward) were now bouncing back towards their

source from an opaque wall of virtually impenetrable mist. This ghostly obstruction completely obliterated the familiar landscape that normally would have manifested directly in front of me.

Nevertheless, its murky mass was shattered abruptly without warning. An enormous celestial globe with blinding green and golden flames fractured the vaporous atmosphere from high above. This meteoroidal sphere[11] dove diagonally downward into nearby Lake Tarleton while unleashing upon the air what could only be described as a muffled yet thunderous roar. At the moment of contact with earthbound water, irresistible illumination washed over that entire foggy realm, compelling every aspect of the region's obscurity to vanish instantly.

Without warning, the entire countryside (including fields, forests, lakes, neighboring mountains, and sky) burst into a brief, beauteous vision of an emerald-green dawn. After several seconds of unearthly and brilliant radiance, revealing this entire landscape in intricate detail, all inordinate daylight vanished and phantomlike fog resumed. But just before a shadowy haze completely reclaimed my homeward path, one enveloping voice resounded unexpectedly within the fading light and spoke to me with ultimate assurance:

Your prayers of this night are answered now.

Each of those three cash gifts mentioned above came to me in a manner that I never could have expected or predicted. Throughout the past several decades, innumerable visitations have brought me scores of unforeseen blessings such as these. So many godsends have graced my life. What purpose could they have other than to fill my being with overflowing love and bring endless joy and gratitude to my heart? What other purpose could they have other than to reveal all perfect potentialities found within our garden of the mind?

For the three years just before moving to New Hampshire, I occasionally visited an aunt and uncle who lived near the Connecticut shore. Their home was situated in a sleepy community overlooking Long Island Sound. On a sunny weekend in early May, they invited me to join them for a midday meal. When I arrived at their doorstep just before noon, my aunt cheerfully greeted me and suggested that I take a walk to the beach. She said that our Sunday dinner would be ready to serve by the time I returned, so I headed down the private way to a nearby point.

A couple of minutes later I found myself at the waterfront. For me, it was a very special

[11] Many years after this experience occurred, I eventually discovered that such a phenomenon is commonly referred to as a fireball. To have witnessed (and survived) that type of event at close range apparently is quite rare. If that sizable object had missed the lake entirely and instead had made contact with the adjacent dry ground, I conceivably might not be here now to convey what had happened those nearly five, short decades ago.

and familiar place. The beach was deserted that day except for several seagulls and a few other birds. Some gulls were diving for fish, but the majority of these feathered residents could be found sunning themselves contentedly on rocks nearby. Adjacent to the swimming area was an old pier that stretched out into the water. Gentle sea breezes wafted up the coastline from the south. These whispering winds were clean and fresh, making visibility across the sound to Long Island exceptionally good. There was no other way to describe how I felt…other than it was a perfect day.

I slowly strolled to the end of the pier, often stopping to absorb all sights, sounds, and smells of this serene seaside setting. When I reached the far edge, I decided to sit down upon the salty, wooden planks. Facing the water view, I sat down, nimbly crossed my legs, and immediately began to meditate.

It was an easy undertaking to fall quickly into a deep, contemplative state while being surrounded by such serenity. Several minutes passed before I became fully aware of a remarkable transformation taking place within and around me.

Magnetic hands suddenly forced my eyes to open widely. Disbelief engulfed my senses when I saw myself quietly sitting in another place—other than where I thought I actually was. It appeared that I was more than a hundred yards off the pier, levitating slightly above water level. I continually looked downward to make certain my body was still seated upon the boarded walkway. Apparently, I seemed to be situated on the pier as well.

Then those same invisible hands thrust my head around so that I could view the shoreline. I saw myself in a third position, seated on a rock next to the opposite end of the pier. Once again, my head was coaxed to move in yet another direction. This time I was urged to face upward. There I could see myself floating in midair while maintaining a cross-legged position dozens of feet above the water.

The moment I was mindful of myself in all four positions, I began experiencing simultaneously a unifying awareness of reality from each location. I could feel the rock underneath me on the shore. I felt the comforting warmth from its constant exposure to hours of morning sunlight. A seagull began to squawk at me, loudly complaining about my presence on that rock. My instant appearance there gave him no time to retreat from his perch, and I seemed to alarm him greatly. Normally, seagulls just fly off to a distance they deem as being safe. But this bird seemed to be stunned by its fright and continued to cry out to me from its perch only a few feet away.

At the same time, I was dipping both hands into the surf just below me while being suspended directly over the sea. I found myself enjoying its salty wetness running through my fingers. Concurrently, a stinging wind stirring high above the earth whipped past my heaven-bound self, chafing my cheeks and arms. The sun dazzled my eyes while I drifted aloft in that breezy azure sky. And still I continued to feel the rough, scratchy boards of the pier. Tiny splinters prickled my bare legs and occasionally penetrated the shorts I was wearing.

Seconds, minutes, and even hours seemed to have passed. However, time was irrelevant and so was timelessness. Oneness and separation were the same condition. Equally, I was hot and cold, wet and dry, burned and soothed. I was on firm ground and floating in the air. I was in the sky gazing earthward, in the sound looking shoreward, on the rock searching outward and upward. I still was on the pier glancing back at myself on the shore, above the water, and in the air.

Regardless of all emotions, thoughts, and physical sensations passing through me, the only perception that remained unremitting was one of pure rapture. Other than this overpowering love cradling me in blankets of blissful clarity, everything else was rendered irrelevant by its own obscure transience.

Suddenly, my uncle appeared out of nowhere. He was walking swiftly towards me with an enormous grin on his face. Although I was seated on the pier facing seaward (away from the shore), the other three aspects of myself clearly saw him approaching. At that instant, I immediately retreated back into a single body, stood up off the wooden planks, and turned around to meet him.

When we stood face-to-face he exclaimed that dinner was ready, and they had waited as long as they could for me to return to the house on my own. My aunt suggested that he come and retrieve me. Then his smile widened further across his face. I sheepishly asked him if he saw anything unusual. He nodded and replied:

There were four of you.

Suddenly, he stretched out his arm, pointed to the rock on the shore, the place out in the water, and my perch in the sky. He further exclaimed:

Of course, you were also here at the end of the pier.

Finally, he tapped my hands, my arms, and then looked inquisitively into my eyes. My

upper limbs were still drenched from being submerged in water. This certainly happened while my *aquatic* personage went hovering above the sound. It would have been impossible for me to wet them from the pier. During this current low tide, the dock was much too high for me to reach over and touch the surf.

My uncle then brushed off my pants with his hands. They still were covered with a great deal of sand and crumbling, dried-up barnacles. Apparently, I must have acquired these souvenirs from the boulder on the beach. The pier may have been splintery but it was completely free of all other residues.

In a whisper, I told my uncle that I never went on the beach that day. I came straight to the end of the pier to meditate. He knowingly nodded, placed his hand upon my shoulder, and quietly walked me back to the house.

If time, distance, and space were actual, then these episodes from my life absolutely couldn't have happened. Yet, if they were merely the type of hallucinations that some might insist them to be, then none of these things could have produced the multitude of subsequent physical ramifications definitely occurring and oftentimes witnessed and experienced by others.

In past situations, present affairs, and even in past and present dreams, no one can foresee detailed events from the future exactly as they happen unless those events are part of what exists *now*. Additionally, no one can witness current happenings in depth while living at a distance from those happenings unless they are part of what also exists *here*.

Let us step back in time to the birth of planet earth, Christ's crucifixion, Pilgrims landing at Plymouth Rock, or planting a final stone on the Great Wall of China. Next, let us jump forward in time to a possible human landing on Jupiter, the improbable prospect that someone we encounter will become Prime Minister of Antarctica, or an excursion to the year 5000 AD. Then if we ask ourselves, "When is this?" the only valid answer for all times and in all cases would be:

Now.

We can travel to any point in known or unknown space. We might visit the North Pole, the southern tip of South America, the summit of Mount Everest, miles down in an ocean trench, the Sea of Tranquility on the moon, or a planet in another galaxy. We might whizz across the universe at (or beyond) the speed of light or jump from one alternate reality to another. No

matter where we are, if we ask ourselves, "Where is this?", the only legitimate reply to all places and all points in space would be:

Here.

Regardless of whether we believe or imagine ourselves to be in *actual* time, fabricated time, this life, another lifetime, this world, a dream, a vision, another dimension, a possibility, an improbability, heaven, hell, purgatory, Nirvana, a daydream, a hope, a hallucination, or an eternity, the truth of our presence in the garden of the mind lies exclusively in *here* and *now*.

Here is the one place that has infinite potential to eradicate all dualities of space and its distances; and *now* is the single moment that is capable of dissolving every illusion of time and its distances. But without divine love present in the *here and now*, they too can be subverted into more problematic seesaw mechanisms: here and there, here and everywhere, now and then, now and again, now and forever—and even the duality of *here and now* itself.

At face value these dichotomous pairs may seem innocuous. But each of them has the capacity to generate endless strife and confusion. We must remember that without love, all virtuous seeds in the garden can grow into a multitude of weedy dualistic distortions, yielding only more struggle and unbalance.

In order to experience the authenticity of our existence, we must recognize that *everywhere* essentially is *here*. Normally, *everywhere* is perceived as an inclusion of all positions in space, points measured and defined by their distances from one another. But when our practice becomes consistently masterful, consciously creating and emanating balance, oneness, and divine love in everything upon which we think and act, *here* instantly becomes the exclusive *everywhere*.

Additionally, *forever* veritably is *now*. Customarily, we perceive *forever* as encompassing all moments contrived in time and incorporates all distances between each of those moments. In legitimate reality, *now* is the exclusively genuine and ultimate *forever*. Such an insight becomes more apparent to us as we weed out all dualistic deceptions—the illusions that have led us to believe time, distance, and space are actually real.

As much as this unholy trinity of weeds (and all that manifests within it) is a consequence of practice, everything eradicating or transcending these illusory distortions also must be practiced. There are those who would say emphatically that they never practiced a belief about anything ever happening to them. However, nothing transpires without the practice and

nurturing of thought, even if that practice occurs in a state of oblivion.

IV.

The grace forever enfolding us...

During my late teens and early twenties, when I frequently traveled to New York City for piano coaching, I often took the subway from Grand Central Station to the station at 103rd Street and Broadway. Then I would walk a few blocks further until I arrived at the home of my two piano professors, those of whom I spoke earlier in the chapter.

At that time, New York was a considerably more perilous city than it has become in recent years. Before any time that I ventured into town alone, there were those who would encourage me never to look directly at anyone and to avoid eye contact whenever possible. They also suggested walking briskly and purposefully, always looking straight ahead. This advice was offered as a tool for circumnavigating muggers and any others with nefarious intentions.

Nevertheless, I tended to be thrilled by and curious about everyone in this strange environment. Such exotic surroundings seemed so radically foreign to a mere *country boy* such as myself. Fortunately, I had exceptional and unusually expansive peripheral vision that I often used for examining those who were situated close-by. This could be done completely without their knowing and abetted me in performing a frequent ritual of mine—offering thoughts and prayers of comfort, healing, and love to anyone whose eyes or facial expressions betrayed signs of weariness, illness, sadness, or any other form of distress.

One summer afternoon, I was inconspicuously perusing the faces of each person clustering around me in a hot, sticky subway car headed uptown. About halfway down the aisle from where I happened to be seated, there stood by himself an unusually tall African man. He was dressed in—what I assumed to be—a traditional white robe. Though coarse and thick in texture, his tribal garb fell flowingly and gracefully to the floor. A large wooden crucifix dangled

about his massive chest as he quietly peered out of smudged and filmy windows, delineating the interior of that subterranean carriage.

His countenance seemed to sob a silent suffering; so without hesitation, I immediately began directing voiceless consolations towards him. I secretly performed this ritual while pretending to peruse the multitude of advertisements that were positioned conspicuously overhead. But after endless minutes, while proffering these gentle intercessions on his behalf, the brakes of this underground chariot began to squeal deafeningly through dark and dangerous corridors. The antiquated transport suddenly decelerated through an unnerving succession of thrusts and jerks, while countless bodies, minds, and emotions rattled and reeled towards another of several successive subway stops.

As we thundered precariously to the next station's loading platform, the man abruptly turned his head towards me and walked quickly in my direction without warning. When he reached the portion of the bench where I was sitting, he halted before me, looked deeply into my eyes, smiled a vast smile, and surprisingly addressed me softly by name. As the car doors bolted open, he mouthed the words *thank you* and quickly vanished amid both the milling and purposeful throngs.

After this man had exited the train, I remained seated in a magnetized state of elation; and yet, a cloud of bewilderment also hung about me. Who was he? How could a complete stranger pick me out of a large crowd, know who I was, and thank me for such a seemingly intangible and ephemeral act as was this intended yet unspoken (and ultimately invisible) kindness? What sort of personage was he who could detect that I was focusing on him in thought? My eyes had been fixed on a slew of ads located more than ten feet away from where he was standing.

Not completely without a sense of humor I often would ask myself afterwards:

> *How could he have known to call me by name? Was he an angel? Did he come from outer space? Or did we meet upon this world in another time and place, another dimension, or an alternate reality?*

Despite all of these unanswered questions, there eventually arose a wondrous whispering from the depth of my being that gave meaningful purpose to this encounter; and it went something like this:

> *No matter how insignificant, ineffective, or unrealizable our hopes and prayers may appear*

to us at any moment, somewhere there is someone or something that will be affected by those potentially sacred seeds of thought…

And whenever we fertilize them with endless infusions of loving intention—nourishing them diligently with a compassionate heart—then their miraculous, unifying, life-enhancing effects will penetrate and materialize even beyond the illusory edges of space and time, and across their fallacious distances as well.

A few years following that cryptic subway incident, I arrived in New Hampshire and began residing in the remote upland home near Lake Armington and Lake Tarleton that I mentioned earlier. During one particularly warm autumn there, I found myself spending eight hours each day in practice, preparing for three piano recitals and several other upcoming musical events. However, on one unusually warm September morning, after having finished the first half of my daily practice, I decided to take the afternoon off and hike up to one of my favorite destinations in Franconia Notch. After all, it happened to be my birthday and there was an underlying sense rising within me that I should find a way to enjoy my special day in one way or another.

Reaching Lonesome Lake from the base of this scenic pass is mainly possible from two starting points. The most direct trail begins at a campground located near the center of the notch and climbs steadily through typical New England forestland. However, a second path follows the remarkable Cascade Brook partway, before continuing up to the lake within a deep mountain wood.

That day I chose to travel alongside the brook since it would provide the most refreshing route on such a hot afternoon. For much of its first mile, this wonderful waterway is an unfoldment of continually successive waterfalls, chutes, cascades, and clear mountain pools.

Instead of hiking up the trail itself, bypassing many magnificent water views hidden nearby, I chose a preferable alternative. Deviating from the path altogether, I traversed a chain of enormous, flat granite slabs through which this portion of the mountain brook coursed. While climbing up and splashing through the liquid rush and spray of never-ending torrents, it was always enticing to take brief but invigorating respites by plunging into any number of the sparkling, intimate pools situated along the way.

Once I arrived at the lake, I immediately removed my pack and rushed into the brisk mountain bath. After swimming a couple of hundred feet away from the dock, I came to a halt and began treading water. This allowed me to remain relatively still, so I could absorb the

astoundingly beautiful panoramas embracing me from all sides. While pondering how this wondrous landscape reminded me so much of when I lived in the French Alps as an exchange student, I found myself captive in a blissful reverie. How I yearned to be in Haute Savoie once again, because it was the happiest time of my younger years.[12]

Regrettably, this marvelous trance was broken much too soon when a man and his teenage son swam swiftly in my direction. Nevertheless, I was happy for this unexpected interruption. They both had huge smiles on their faces while shouting out their *hellos*. Although dozens of people spent time aside this lake that day, these two were the only souls who spoke more than a word to me.

Once we finished our introductions, the father instantly began explaining why they would always come to Lonesome Lake every year in September. He mentioned that this was their absolute favorite place on earth and was why they stopped by to celebrate their birthdays there together before returning home to France. Excitedly, I replied that it was my birthday as well. Once we wished each other a *happy birthday*, I added that I also stayed in France when I was fourteen.

After asking them where their home was, the father exclaimed that they bought a beautiful place in a remote part of the country—and I probably wouldn't be familiar with the region. Regardless, I persisted by questioning them again. The son then told me they lived in Haute Savoie. Once I remarked that this was where I stayed too, I then wanted to know the name of their town.

Again they said:

You probably aren't familiar with the place.

But when they answered *Annecy*, I found much delight in pronouncing that this indeed was my town also.

However, they continued by stating that their house wasn't in Annecy itself, but among the cliffs overlooking the town. I interjected:

Do you mean that you live in Les Espagnoux?" [13]

Surprised at my familiarity with the vicinity, they both said emphatically:

[12] Haute Savoie is a province in eastern France, situated on the Swiss frontier.
[13] During the Spanish Inquisition, a group of Protestants fled Spain and hid in a series of caves found within the cliffs overlooking Annecy, France. Hence, this outer region of the village was nicknamed *Les Espangoux*.

Yes!

Once we discovered that all three of us lived on the same country road, it took only a few moments more to determine that I had lived in the house next to the one where they were residing currently. If I still had been living there, we would be neighbors, all three of us, with the same birthday!

How is it possible that of the dozens of people I passed on that particular day, this father and son were the only mortal beings who actually conversed with me? Not only did they happen to have the same birthday as mine, but our supposed *chance* meeting actually took place on that special day. They lived thousands of miles away in a remote mountain home next door to the place where I too happened to live years before.

Furthermore, this unexpected, joint birthday celebration that we were sharing together occurred on an isolated upland lake also in the heart of a mountainous region—but on an entirely different continent. Our joyful meeting had been preceded only a few seconds earlier by silent reminiscences about my own Alpine experiences long ago. For the very first time since childhood, my thoughts just happened to be focused on the happy times spent there in Annecy. What a wonderful gift it was for me when my afternoon reveries almost instantly unfolded into such a festive occasion. It was like the surprise birthday party that none of us had ever planned!

In my early thirties, several committee members urged me to take on a new residency that I found myself reluctant to accept. My hesitation was due to the similarity between this particular situation and others I had experienced previously. Each of those earlier positions turned out to be unfortunate at best. However, after being assured emphatically of a permanent financial arrangement that would allow me to live comfortably and work unimpeded without further monetary constraints, I tentatively accepted.

Nevertheless, soon discovering that nothing pledged to me would be fulfilled, the following year undoubtedly became one of the most disruptive and demoralizing chapters of my life. I was flung into a succession of three (relatively brief) living situations that immediately became injurious both to my physical health and emotional well-being. Additionally, because of the constant human hubbub rising up from the heart of that thriving university town, the ongoing traffic and the invasive street lights forever besieging everyone's psyche, I found myself yearning for dark, still, and starry nights—like those gracing the mountain home where I lived in years past.

During my final few weeks there, I began to sense an urgent need for finding some quiet outdoor refuge nearby. I very much desired a place where I could be totally alone. Because I had almost no means to leave the area even for a few hours, it became more and more challenging not to feel completely trapped between the bustle of a widespread campus and the neighboring commercial portion of town.

After all, instead of that year freeing my life both financially and creatively (as I was led to believe), it instead thrust me into a state of destitution and despair. Not only did I find those dismal circumstances increasingly claustrophobic, but I also had no clue as to how I might release myself from their life-cleaving clutches. It is true that if my time there had been more favorable and less deprecating, a strategy for escape wouldn't have been necessary nor would that particular time and place have evoked such unpleasant memories for decades.

In spite of this, a curious turn of events began to unfold on an unusually hot and muggy morning in June. While I was walking across the village green, a total stranger rushed up to me out of the blue. She began speaking to me amicably as though we were long-lost friends. Her initial monologue suddenly accelerated into incessant babblings about how oppressive the humidity was for that time of year.

Then, without even giving me an opportunity to introduce myself appropriately, she offhandedly started speaking about a little-known wildlife sanctuary. It incorporated some nearby forestland and fields. There also was a path that descended past a series of cliffs and ended up alongside the Connecticut River. Furthermore, she added how much more pleasant it would be to take a walk there instead of being assaulted by such stifling midday heat in the center of town.

This new information piqued my interest, but I found it impossible to find a pause in her never-ending, verbal *stream of unconsciousness*. There was simply neither time nor space when I might (or where I might) interject even the quickest question politely. Finally, it just burst out of me:

Where is this place!?!

And without missing a beat, she replied that I could find it easily. Supposedly, it was a simple walk from where we stood in the middle of town.

After expressing my thanks for her unexpected tip, I ran all the way back to the basement apartment where I was residing. Once there, I quickly changed into a tank top and a pair of

shorts; and then I went out to my car to check whether there was enough fuel in the gas tank to make a short trip.

Then, I spent the next several minutes driving to this newfound park. It turned out to be wise not to walk there after all—since I already had the beginnings of a serious sunburn brought about by my prolonged stopover on the common. Also, I soon discovered that the directions were not very accurate. It would have been nearly impossible for me to find the place on foot without spending most of the day in an extensive search.

The sanctuary was situated in a quiet residential area, high above the river. Only an inordinately small sign gave any clue that it actually was open to the public. Furthermore, this hand-carved notice had been posted several yards back from the street so the property obviously was intended solely for the use of locals.

After parking close to the trailhead, I quickly peeled off sticky socks and sneakers before leaping out of the car. An eager expectation of what lay ahead permeated my senses. Running barefooted across prickly, summer-scorched turf, I immediately entered into a grove of longstanding hemlocks, spruce, and pines; and for a few hundred feet further, one great coniferous canopy sheltered me from the broiling, stagnant rays of a noonday sun. Instead, my entire body was instantly washed clean in this seeming subterranean sea—swimming through cool, invigorating currents of a soft, subtle, yet distinctly scented evergreen breeze.

Without hesitation I halted, closed my eyes, drank deeply from the silent, vaporous wisps surrounding me, and listened to a welcoming stillness that I hadn't encountered for many months. After taking this brief, much-needed repose, I proceeded to the edge of the wood and entered a wide-open area covered with a colorful assortment of wildflowers and high turf. Once the meadow had been crossed, my track brought me into a forest that encompassed the cliffs by the river.

Soon thereafter, I descended down past one of the cliff faces by way of an insignificant path. Soon finding myself on the banks of the Connecticut, I immediately chose to take a brief dip in the water. Subsequently, I meditated for well over an hour while sitting quietly upon the shoreline. Once this had been accomplished, my day's journey brought me back up to the open field above the cliffs once again.

All during this jaunt I continued to slip back into a deep, contemplative state; and not until I yet again was well into the meadow did I spot a very large dog standing about a hundred yards ahead of me. It was only when I happened to be no more than a few feet away from him

did I realize that this was no ordinary dog. His overall build was quite impressive, and he had a bright and silky auburn coat—which virtually glistened in the sunlight.

Yet, despite our close proximity to each other, he still didn't notice me. His head stretched back towards the direction of the hemlock grove and beyond. He may have been listening to something upon the roadway or around the houses nearby. Since I was walking barefooted, and being in an exceptionally serene state, he apparently never heard my approach nor sensed me in any other way. Being so close to him in that instant, I could have patted his head without taking any further steps forward.

However, after having been tempted to call to him gently and offer an extended hand upward in greeting, a single thought suddenly exploded upon my mind. It amplified into a state of awareness so intense that I heard a thunderous voice speak the same words over and over again. An endless, echoing array of utterances was my consciousness crying out to me:

This is a wolf!

At that exact moment, he immediately became aware of my presence and shot his head forward. He now focused all of his attention on the person suddenly appearing before him. His eyes were wild, shining, icy, and bright blue. We stared into each other's soul for a minute that lasted a lifetime. Rationally speaking, I knew that I should be feeling fear or alarm (or at least an ounce of concern), but the only emotion that arose from within me was absolute wonder.

A slight smile slowly crept over my lips; and after he keenly observed those nearly-indistinguishable changes in my facial expression, he spun around gracefully and streaked away in silence. His flight out of sight took only an instant. But immediately following his disappearance into the hemlocks, this rare red wolf let out a single, resonant, and glorious howl.[14] [15]

---

[14] Although I referred to this particular wolf as a *red wolf*, I found no photos anywhere of wolves (red or otherwise) that came close to resembling the one I met in the nature reserve that day. Some people with whom I spoke suggested it might be a timber wolf, but it definitely was too large to be one of that variety.

It most definitely was a full-sized wolf and an unusually large one at that. Also, all the photographed red wolves I found on the Internet had traces of reddishness in their fur, but they were not of the solid, bright, rich auburn sort like the one I encountered that day. I've seen at least another dozen wolves in the wild, and this one was the most unique, striking, and truly beautiful creature that I have ever come across.

[15] At this point, I must state emphatically that my encounter with this wolf doesn't imply that I advocate treating such animals as if they were domesticated. I do not. They are large predators and their behavior can be aggressive and unpredictable. My approaching this one wasn't done with deliberate intention. Though we might speculate that if I had known what I was facing beforehand, his reaction to my advance certainly could have been very different—even aggressive and possibly dangerous. Certainly, it is possible that he reacted the way he did because he sensed no fear nor threat from me. Perhaps he was fascinated by my calm demeanor and silent appearance directly in front of him. Yet, these too are

During the next few weeks, I returned to this sanctuary several more times. But that first visit was the only one when I arrived with the sun still being overhead. I used it as a way to get a sense of the place before actually venturing out after dark. However, once my nighttime walks began, I experienced the same sequence of events each time.

Soon after entering the hemlock grove from the roadway, I would hear heavy rustling sounds several yards off to my left. As I proceeded through the wood, this audible movement continued to accompany me. It paralleled my path while escorting me through the grove. The distance between the continuous woodland noise and my position on the trail always remained constant. The sound never came closer nor did it go further away. Yet, when I departed from that canopied covert to enter the meadow, all crunching and crackling ceased. The nearby noises never followed me further.

After trekking down to the river and back again, I would cross the meadow and enter a familiar deep darkness of hemlocks once more. As soon as I returned to that place, a rustling regularly recommenced; and it persistently shadowed me for the duration of my time in the grove. Once I left that sanctuary and set foot upon the roadway, all sounds of twigs and branches snapping in the underbrush ceased and an immeasurable wolfish wail pierced the still night. I had no choice other than succumbing to what seemed to be a rapturous cry of joy.

Each nocturnal trip there ended with a singular, solitary howl. I regularly departed in a state of bliss. My body was magnetized with a peace beyond comprehension. Equally, my mind felt a reassurance that I hadn't experienced for a very long time.

As was the case in each of my excursions to this river park, my final walk was done in profound meditation and prayer. I made many supplications to be freed from my current situation. It was imperative that I find a way to leave the town where I was then living.

When I had made a final crossing through the evergreens, preparing to return to my car, an ultimate wolfish cry of farewell broke through the darkness. While this familiar call continued to crack the black abyss of night with triumphant song, my entire body suddenly was touched by mesmeric, unseen hands once again; and in the same manner as when years earlier the meteoroidal fireball plummeted into Lake Tarleton before me, a great and resonant voice spoke through the infinite realms of midnight:

Your prayers have been answered now.

---

merely speculations. Since and before then, I have stumbled upon wolves numerous times. In each case, I never came close to them. They should always be treated with respect and ample caution and never approached.

Early the next morning, I received an unexpected call from an acquaintance I had known for several years, though we hadn't seen one another for many weeks. She and her husband had recently decided to make me a surprising offer. Their generous proposal would allow me to move immediately from my current living situation. Indeed, I gratefully accepted and arranged to depart within the next few days.[16]

Countless hundreds of such synchronicities have I witnessed throughout my time here on earth. In the past, when speaking of some of these occurrences to skeptical acquaintances, those who especially prided themselves in their pragmatic and logical approach to living in the world, the response was often predictably the same. They felt that these incidents had to be nothing more than a succession of odd coincidences. Alternative yet equally vague and unconvincing explanations were also given. Certainly, none of them were truly pragmatic or logical at all.

Aside from such points of view, there were those who thought that these numerous stories from my life were wholly unique, inspirational, and even extraordinary. Still others deemed them to be only exaggerations, fabrications, or hallucinated fantasies.

Regardless of any said opinions, these experiences proved to be influential and transforming moments in my reality. None of them were abnormal nor were they unusual to me, so to label such things as being *flukes* or to refer to them as being purely *coincidental* defies the simple meanings of those two words. On the contrary, these types of events were relatively commonplace, especially during certain phases of my life. Additionally, hundreds of similar stories have been described to me again and again by countless others, regarding what they too have encountered within their own lives.

When I have employed the word *synchronicity* herein, it wasn't intended to signify mere happenstance. Anything deemed as being purely chance in actuality is a misidentification of something much more potent. Swiss psychologist Carl Jung reinvented *synchronicity* as a new term, and part of his refashioned definition describes it as:

> ...temporally coincident occurrences of acausal events.

To expand upon Jung's usage of the word within the current context, synchronous events

[16] After moving away from that town, I often revisited the wildlife sanctuary nonetheless. Hoping that I might encounter my wolfish friend once more, I ventured there dozens of times after dark. As he never revealed himself to me during those visits, I also tried returning in daylight. Despite the innumerable attempts to reconnect with him, our paths never crossed again.

only appear coincidental within the illusory confines of time, distance, and space. However, if we practice clearing away those weeds so that we reawaken a state of balance, oneness, and divine love, such events are seemingly random no longer but powerful and purposeful materializations within our lives. When we recreate for ourselves a state of oneness manifesting through balance and divine love, we become aware of these synchronous conditions all around us. We recognize them in others who are also existing in that oneness, and those others recognize them in us as well.

These types of synchronicities are ever-present in each of our lives, but we usually have been blinded by the weeds of (what I deem to be) *separation by impossibilities*. This means that our well-practiced thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions—reflecting our equally well-practiced, misguided notions about the inevitability of impossibility—develop into weeds that hide and separate these synchronicities from us. When we accept and cultivate such a deluded state within our convictions, synchronicities seemingly are unfeasible and consequently do not exist. Thus, they will never occur in our lives readily and anything resembling them appears to us as being strictly arbitrary and coincidental.

We therefore exist under the false impression that these synchronous occurrences cannot possibly happen to us, they are not likely to happen to us, and it is never plausible for them to happen to us. However, we are separated from them solely by our well-practiced illusory belief that synchronicities are an unfeasibility in our lives. Nevertheless, they certainly are possible, likely, and plausible because these phenomena already are working continuously around us and within.

How many opportunities pass us by on a daily basis, those that offer an entrance into the oneness of humanity and of all that is? When we recognize a smile of recognition, a tug of warning, an invisible hand of guidance—or when we make the right choice, turn the right corner, ask the right question, commit the appropriate act of random kindness anywhere and everywhere—it will be the right time and the right place for true synchronicities to unfold. They readily rip away the separating illusions of time, distance, and space while demonstrating to us the paradoxically infinite possibilities of oneness.

With this in mind, we could very well contemplate how the preceding examples of synchronous and profound connections between all human beings and other living creatures as well may indeed resonate with the far-seeing and mathematically supported conclusions of

renowned physicist David Bohm[17] when he said:

> …inseparable quantum interconnectedness of the whole universe is the fundamental reality, and that relatively independent behaving parts are merely particular and contingent forms within this whole.[18]

Even the unifying, miraculous experiences that are deemed as inexplicable or unattainable are neither incomprehensible nor implausible when we remove temporal, spatial, and causal weeds of separation from our perceptions. In fact, the wondrous existence of oneness is then allowed to reestablish itself as the sole manifestation of genuine reality.

Not only can our transcendence beyond the acceptance of time, distance, and space as our immutable trinity reward us with experiences like those mentioned earlier in the chapter, but we also can experience such conditions in an infinite variety of other circumstances. Practicing, performing, or listening to music often can bring us across this threshold into a variety of experiences in a state of interconnectedness. The elation occasionally found in running (or in any other sport) and excelling in almost every balanced, well-mastered endeavor can also allow us to make a jump beyond the confines of what we regularly have assumed to be reality.

Ascending onto mountaintops, designing or discovering elegant mathematical equations, viewing or creating magnificent masterworks of art, experiencing exceptional performances in theater and film, offering our help to the disenfranchised, aiding those who are victimized or impoverished, comforting the ill, aged, or dying, simply taking walks through the woods, sitting by the seashore, reciting our favorite poetry, reading passages from uplifting prose, and even lovingly performing simple tasks (such as dicing potatoes, scrubbing floors, or changing a baby's diaper) can carry us out of space, remove us from time, and eradicate all of our distances within both—even if only for an instant. These are the moments when we genuinely have accepted and actually are fulfilling our truest nature within oneness. We have wakened ourselves upon a remembrance of our own union with divine love, which is the veritable entirety of the mind garden.

In the middle of Chapter 1, I mentioned how great heroic epics familiarize us with,

---

[17] According to *Wikipedia*, David Bohm (1917–1992) was:

> …an American scientist who has been described as one of the most significant theoretical physicists of the 20th century and who contributed unorthodox ideas to quantum theory, neuropsychology and the philosophy of mind.

[18] In his book *The Physics of God*, Joseph Selbie cites this phrase by Bohm.

instruct us in, and simply entertain us by employing nearly every conceivable type of dualistic struggle within their storylines. In other words, they portray a part of what we normally assume to be human reality or fabricate fantastical tales that nevertheless reflect our mortal condition of never-ending opposites.

The Lord of the Rings trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien is one such work. Throughout this celebrated epic, the author paints vast, imaginary murals displaying the seemingly universal struggles perennially facing our world: war and peace, good and evil, conquest and defeat, life and death, hope and despair, beauty and ugliness, loyalty and betrayal, immortality and transience to name but a few. Within the closing sections of *The Return of the King* (the third and final book in this trilogy), there is an exceptional passage that illustrates the possibility of all dualities merging into a sublime union when ultimate love prevails:

> …in the midst of their merriment and tears, the clear voice of the minstrel rose like silver and gold, and all…were hushed. And he sang to them…until their hearts, wounded with sweet words, overflowed, and their joy was like swords, and they passed in thought out to regions where pain and delight flow together and tears are the very wine of blessedness.

There have been countless moments when I have heard, recited, or silently read these lines, and a subsequent, timeless ascent into rapture unexpectedly ensued. Admittedly, I have always been partial to this passage ever since I first discovered it decades ago. It affirms the transcendent merging of every earthly dichotomy—where even our joy and pain result in an instantaneous and blessed oneness. Such a sanctified state has the capacity to unite us together in endless, all-encompassing grace. To paraphrase Tolkien, by stating that we can manifest through thought a place where pain and delight join and our tears become the actual *wine of blessedness*, we are simply affirming that such an existence of pure being can occur whenever the appropriate thoughts have been practiced fully.

Although Tolkien's account—portraying the epic, dualistic struggles of humanity's heroic quest—is one of fiction, the writings of philosopher Joseph Campbell are not. Once again, I must mention his classic book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. This widely acclaimed study of the hero's perilous mission of transformation reveals how in all human civilizations of the past and present, within each of their myths, legends, religions, and cultures exists a single archetypal *savior*. Although many superficial features of this champion may vary from legend to legend

and society to society, the most important attributes tend to be similar or identical, no matter when or where each manifestation of the hero evolved.

In the following, insightful illustration, Campbell eloquently describes the inexorable journey from birth and life unto death that we (as the *heroes* in our own lives) must face while existing within the weedy snares of duality—a journey which normally is referred to fatalistically as the human condition:

> Sigmund Freud stresses in his writings the passages and difficulties of the first half of the human cycle of life—those of our infancy and adolescence, when our sun is mounting towards its zenith. C. G. Jung, on the other hand, has emphasized the crises of the second portion—when, in order to advance, the shining sphere must submit to descend and disappear, at last, into the night-womb of the grave. The normal symbols of our desires and fears become converted, in this afternoon of the biography, into their opposites; for it is then no longer life but death that is the challenge. What is difficult to leave, then, is not the womb but the phallus—unless, indeed, the life-weariness has already seized the heart, when it will be death that calls with the promise of bliss that formerly was the lure of love. Full circle, from the tomb of the womb to the womb of the tomb, we come: an ambiguous , enigmatical incursion into a world of solid matter that is soon to melt from us, like the substance of a dream. And, looking back at what had promised to be our own unique, unpredictable, and dangerous adventure, all we find in the end is such a series of standard metamorphoses as men and women have undergone in every quarter of the world, in all recorded centuries, and under every odd disguise of civilization.

Regardless of any duality that faces us throughout our time on earth, all experiences and happenings simply are the results of what we practice through our emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions—consciously or unconsciously, consistently or inconsistently, correctly or incorrectly, completely or incompletely. They manifest from individual ideas and from group thinking. They exist even from ancestral and possible prenatal thoughts. They could be the undesirable offspring of dualistic weeds or the fruit of divine attributes. During the course of this chapter, what each preceding episode illustrates is that through spontaneous and balanced moments we can ascertain our true oneness with all times, all places, here and now!

Because here is the perfect place and now is the ideal time, we must choose a bright,

flawless condition for ourselves *Here and Now*. If this choice is nurtured perpetually with practiced compassion, then it will grow instantly into the veritable flowers, fruits, vegetables, and herbs of our garden. Indeed, it can be the reactivation and reawakening of all divine attributes in our minds, in our hearts, and in our lives.

But even as we discover the ultimate here and now, there is still one more threshold within the mind garden through which we must pass, a gate leading into the balanced, sacred soil of true oneness and divine love. Meister Eckhart acknowledged such a destination as the sole, authentic state of our lives. Only after we genuinely realize and accept that divine love has always dwelt within us (where the kingdom of heaven and its resident divinity also have always existed) [19] will the illusions of time, distance, and space crumble and dissolve into that love. He refers to this condition as the *eternal Now*.

Once we practice living there, within our imperishable sanctuary of *Now*, the trinity of time, distance, and space will cease to exist. Even our most blessed understandings, acknowledgments, and convictions—together with everything else that we deem to be who we truly are—merge into this timeless, spaceless condition without the measurements of any distances and separations to confound us. All weeds are eradicated and all dualities are dissolved inevitably within that sanctified soil.

As we care for our mind garden with deep, rekindled awareness (a profound knowing, which only the state of *Now* can maintain), we inevitably become conscious gardeners; and we do so with gratitude and joy. But while emanating unending thanks and rapturous love, we also become mindful of the instantaneous transformation of ourselves into none other than the garden's blossoms of beauty, sustenance, and eternal healing. With deep conviction we nurture and disseminate our most merciful thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions of agape into every aspect of all being.

So let us commence tending to our Garden of Eden with this fresh litany. Filled with the *eternal Now*, we cry out unto a paradise reawakened:

In the name of balance, oneness, and divine love… Amen.

[19] In the New Testament, when Luke 17:24 states that "the kingdom of God is within you", some translations refer to the *kingdom of God* as the *kingdom of heaven*.

- Chapter 4 -

Practice, Practice, Practice

I.

Mastering practice and practicing mastery...

Pablo de Sarasate,[1] a nineteenth-century violin virtuoso, was reported to have said:

For thirty-seven years I have practiced fourteen hours a day, and now they call me a genius.[2]

[1] Spanish violinist and composer (1844–1908).

[2] Although musical virtuosi during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tended to practice on average significantly more than the great performers of today, Sarasate most likely did exaggerate to some degree when he insisted that his practices lasted fourteen hours every day without fail, and for nearly four decades. Nevertheless, I wouldn't be surprised if he did actually practice that much at least some of the time. Even today, there are still great performers (especially in Russia and other parts of eastern Europe) who adhere to similarly arduous regimens.

But, for anyone to continue doing so on a long-term basis—with no letup at all—is highly unhealthy, potentially injurious, and most likely unsustainable both mentally and physically. I certainly had times when I practiced this much myself, but it couldn't be kept up for very long. Granted, I was in poor health during most of my younger life, which limited my ability to adhere to this sort of brutal routine.

Regardless, the mindset of many (but not all) great musicians in Sarasate's day was that they wouldn't achieve true artistic and technical mastery on their instruments unless they worked their fingers to the bone; and that meant practicing at least ten to twelve hours daily. They often adhered to a musical version of a now rather outdated adage used by some athletes earlier on in past decades:

No pain, no gain!

More than one of my teachers mentioned how their own mentors often eluded to these types of daily *workouts* as being typical objectives of many renowned performers of their generation in the first half of the twentieth century—even though my teachers who told me about these things also admitted that they rarely attempted to study so *overzealously* themselves. Aside from their own reluctance to spend so much time at the piano regularly, there is also the current twenty-first (and late twentieth) century logic that recommends considerably less time to achieve optimum levels of effectiveness.

Back in the 1800s and early 1900s, the rise of virtuoso performers on various instruments needed to perfect the increasingly more dazzling and complex compositions being written at the time—especially for pianists, violinists, and cellists to a lesser degree. (That is because so much more of this kind of virtuosic writing was produced for these instruments specifically.)

Therefore, the approaches to technical mastery were still in varying stages of infancy—or near-infancy—and training techniques were often not as effective, efficient, or consistent as they have evolved to be in more recent decades. This meant significantly more hours were required of earlier performers to achieve results that many of today's artists have learned to accomplish in much less time. Yet, it goes without saying, multiple hours of daily practice are still needed for anyone (whether living nowadays or in centuries past) to learn the massive amounts of music expected to be a part of every concert performer's repertory.

Since the hourly practice requirements throughout anyone's career can and do change (due to the shifts in demands put upon each individual both professionally and personally at any given moment), the focus on each individual's personal practice will undoubtedly need to be adjusted more than once during every artist's lifetime. In the preliminary stages of

This statement reflects a common complaint among countless musicians, artists, writers, actors, athletes, and many others who have attained high levels of mastery in their achievements through years of practice and preparation.

When we are able to do anything with great proficiency, our endeavors often appear effortless to the average bystander. Because the end result of any form of mastery regularly appears easy, many assume that there is no exertion involved and that the individual who achieved this facility must have done so simply by being a *genius*—meaning that there was little need for work or practice.

How many times do people who achieve mastery hear others praise them with comments tainted with yearning and envy such as these?

> *You are so lucky… I wish that I had your talent… If only God would have blessed me with such an incredible gift… I'm so jealous of your abilities… The only way you could be so accomplished is that you must have the right genes… What I would give to do what you can do…*

Oftentimes, the amount of required commitment, work, and sacrifice is downplayed, when others refer to mastery as having remarkable *genius*, being exceptionally *gifted*, or displaying great *talent*. These nebulous expressions usually imply that extraordinary abilities

---

becoming a concert performer, intensive and lengthy practices are needed to master technique and initially memorize huge amounts of musical material; and this process normally occupies a large portion of every young musician's daily work schedule.

In modern society, there is often less time available for personal practice because of all the non-music-related studies that are mandatory for today's young musicians. That simply wasn't the case while Sarasate was growing up, and he thus was able to have much longer practice sessions on his instrument—along with a great deal of added focus on composition, theory, solfege, and other essential music-related pursuits that many students today would find it nearly impossible to fit into their daily activities in as extensive or rigorous manner.

Once the preliminary phases of artistic and technical development start to merge with performing on a regular basis, soloists must spend much more time actually concertizing and traveling. This in itself allows for considerably less time to practice. In fact, many performers consider performances as a substitute for much of their earlier forms of practice.

Some artists also have to teach and lecture more than others. (This is especially relevant to the more recent decades when virtuosi are less apt to have personal patrons to pay for their day-to-day existence, especially while they spend all of their time practicing rather than making money.) And then—in every generation of performers—there are those who shift the main focus of their daily routines to composing, conducting, and musical research while still continuing their concert career as well.

Another factor to consider is when Sarasate was alive, the relatively small group of individuals who were considered to be the musical superstars of the day often had either servants, family members, and/or associates who were willing to take care of their mundane and personal needs such as cooking, housekeeping, and the like. Yet, also in earlier times, there were some known cases where musicians lived alternatively in squalor and didn't keep up with eating consistently and grooming properly because all they wound up doing every day was to practice and/or compose. So they often sentenced themselves into having relatively shorter and sicklier lives.

Regardless of all these possibilities, Sarasate unarguably practiced far more than most people today could ever imagine. His point in making the aforementioned pronouncement was to complain of how the public so flippantly negated his years of painstaking work and sacrifice by reducing his immense labors to nothing other than an effortless and enviable condition that they naïvely imagined preordained *genius* to resemble instead.

manifest in a person solely through good luck, inheritance, or as a gift from God; and the requirement of practice is notably minimized or negated completely.

While anointing a chosen few with titles of being geniuses, we also can unwittingly unleash countless, dualistic weeds upon the garden of our minds: the idea of being favored or not favored, talented or talentless, gifted or ungifted, lucky or unlucky, hallowed or damned.

Those of us who haven't been labeled with one of the endless designations for being *talented*—good enough, fortunate enough, blessed enough, smart enough, strong enough, wise enough, healthy enough—are provided with an exceptional excuse for not practicing consciously:

> *After all, if we aren't born into good luck, good genes, or good grace, it's futile for us even to make an effort. All attempts will be unsuccessful. Therefore, practice is a definite waste of our time and energy.*

Yet, as we repeat these or similar destructive and unconscious litanies to ourselves, it doesn't occur to us how much wasted time and energy such justifications can be! They thwart and strangle every virtuous aspiration while growing into noxious, illusory weeds of jealousy, regret, self-condemnation, and failure. There are no beneficial genes, talent, good luck, or divine blessings that can create what is masterful within us. Instead, they may provide some potential to what might appear as a greater or lesser degree. However, without extensive practice true mastery does not exist.

I was familiar with numerous, serious young musicians, artists, and athletes who initially were considered *untalented* despite the endless hours of practice in which they were engaged daily. However, by changing their approach to practice when they switched teachers or coaches, each of them immediately transformed. They also began winning competitions and were accepted into the best schools with scholarships.

A dramatic example of this type of transformation occurred in the life and career of the formidable Chinese pianist Lang Lang. As a young aspiring musician he practiced ferociously, toiling many long hours every day. However, during one particular piano lesson, his teacher told him that he was talentless and refused to work with him any longer.

Devastated, Lang Lang avoided going home. He was terrified of telling his family this disturbing news. Nevertheless, he eventually mustered up enough courage to admit what had just transpired. Rather than being met with understanding and encouragement, his father

angrily told him that he had failed completely. He also said that Lang Lang's life was no longer worth living and even suggested that he might as well kill himself.

Fortunately, he didn't take his father's advice. Instead, he was soon invited to study with a famous pianist in the West. Once this shift in his studies occurred, his playing quickly transformed and he soon began triumphing repeatedly on the international concert stage. Yet, if he had been duped into succumbing to his first teacher's verdict of failure (as his father had done so readily), his enormous musical presence worldwide most likely would have never manifested.

In reverse situations, there have been those who initially were praised as being *exceptional* and *gifted*. Yet, they eventually were persuaded to change teachers and their approach to practice also changed. Instantly, their abilities suddenly seemed to evaporate; and within a brief time, the new teachers encouraged each of them to find something else to pursue. They were no longer considered *talented*.

Aside from my own personal experience, I also knew two other cases first hand in which both students found enough courage to switch teachers again. After adjusting their practice routines once more, they seemed to regain their former abilities and also excelled beyond them soon thereafter. Obviously, their genes were not the cause of such transformations. Perhaps luck did shift for them or their divine blessings were altered. However, the one thing that certainly did change was *how* they practiced.

If each of these students trained for ten thousand hours unconsciously, inconsistently, incorrectly, and incompletely, their results possibly might not seem masterful. But if a more conscious, consistent, correct, and complete approach were adopted for those same ten thousand hours, at least some aspects of mastery certainly would become apparent. Oftentimes, such a shift in practicing comes about only with the guidance of a new instructor, one whose methods of training are more proficient, inspired, inspiring, and even *masterful*. These changes in approach frequently include being more supportive, encouraging, and compassionate as well. This is not to say that such encouragement should be interpreted as being lax or less stringent.

A famous eighteenth-century example of adopting a radically different practice approach—bringing about significant changes beneficially—can be seen when Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, the great Austrian composer, began to study with a new counterpoint

teacher.[3] Early on, his training in this compositional methodology was rendered by his father Leopold. Although the older Mozart was a noteworthy musician in his own right,[4] his approach to composition often has been regarded as academic and somewhat pedantic. Admittedly, Wolfgang created many fine works while composing under his father's tutelage, but his musical writing truly didn't begin to blossom fully until he was introduced to an ingenious and inspiring teacher.

When Mozart commenced studying with Padre Giovanni Battista Martini[5] in Italy, a major transformation began to take place in his compositional abilities. Piero Melograni's highly acclaimed biography *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart* comments on this shift in the young composer's training:

> Wolfgang set to work with a will, taking counterpoint lessons from Padre Martini, a master in the art. Given that one purpose of their [Leopold's and his son's] Italian voyage was to pursue Wolfgang's musical education, no one could have helped him attain that goal better than Padre Martini. A strong sympathy grew up between the fourteen-year-

---

[3] According to *The Norton/Grove Concise Encyclopedia of Music*, counterpoint is:

> …the art of combining two simultaneous musical lines. The term derives from the Latin *contrapunctum*, "against note". It was first used in the fourteenth century…. When one part is added to an existing one, the new part is said to be "in counterpoint" with it. The term has sometimes been reserved for the theory or study of how one part should be added to another…
>
> Composers of the Classical period [a late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century style of musical writing that employs the Viennese Classical idiom] were trained by such methods, and in the mature works of Mozart and Haydn counterpoint is extensively used to intensify the development sections of sonata-form movements.

Even today, serious students of composition often are required to study and practice using sixteenth- and seventeenth-century counterpoint methods. A mastery of these compositional techniques can greatly enhance the artistic palette of any serious composer.

[4] According to *The Norton/Grove Concise Encyclopedia of Music*, Leopold Mozart was a:

> …German composer, violinist and theorist, father of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. He became a musician to the Count of Thurn and Taxis in Salzburg in 1739…. A prominent violin teacher, he gained international fame with his *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule* (1756). After c1760 his own career took second place to the education of his children, Maria Anna ("Nannerl") and (especially) Wolfgang, whom he took on numerous musical tours.
>
> Leopold Mozart's output includes numerous symphonies, other orchestral pieces (concertos, divertimentos etc.), chamber and keyboard music, oratorios, masses and other sacred works. "Popular" and programmatic elements appear in some of his instrumental music. Of his writings, the *Versuch* (1756), which deals with violin technique and music theory, is one of the foremost musical didactic works of the 18th century.

[5] Padre Giovanni Battista Martini (1706–1784) was an Italian composer, teacher, and writer on various musical subjects. According to *The Norton/Grove Concise Encyclopedia of Music*:

> A monk and later priest, he served at S Francesco, Bologna, as organist (1722–5), then *maestro di cappella*. Widely and deeply respected as a teacher (mainly of counterpoint), he taught Mozart, J.C. Bach, Jommelli and c100 others; he also corresponded with many eminent figures…. He composed prolifically, mostly in the Classical idiom…. Foremost in his writings [literary works] are a history of ancient music (1761–81) and a counterpoint treatise (1774–5). He is one of the most famous figures in 18th-century music.

> old composer and his much older teacher (Martini was sixty-four in 1770). Wolfgang was already familiar with the rules of counterpoint, but where Leopold Mozart had brought pedantry to his exercises, Martini was able to bring to life the extraordinary expressive possibilities inherent in certain compositional techniques.

Now, let us return briefly to discussing Daniel Levin's rule of mastery. Even as we begin to grasp the concept of actually practicing for ten thousand hours, we should consider that such a time frame might only indicate a possible trigger for the masterful to begin manifesting itself in any pursuit. It certainly may not suggest that an actual culmination of mastery has yet materialized.

Therefore, we should examine further Sarasate's statement about his own practice regimen. Practicing fourteen hours daily for thirty-seven years (deducting an arbitrary fifteen percent of these practice hours for possible illness, rest, travel, performances, and other interruptions to his routine), he still would have practiced over one hundred sixty thousand hours by the time he made his assertion about people referring to him as a genius. This amount of study is sixteen times greater than what would be required minimally under the ten thousand hour rule for mastery! Even if we deducted a significantly larger percentage for extraneous activities—or even if Sarasate's claim about his daily practice was somewhat inflated—the resultant practice hours would be immense nonetheless.

Another way to view how much of Sarasate's life was devoted to practice (even if he slept a mere five hours nightly) is that there still would be only a few additional hours each day for him to fulfill every other aspect of his life. A final illustration—certainly demonstrating the enormity of this musician's commitment to his art—would be to imagine one, gigantic, non-stop practice session that potentially could last almost twelve years. It must continue twenty-four hours daily, seven days per week, and never halting for any reason.

Going back to our discussion about Mozart and the importance that practice played in the development of his exceptional artistry, we also should note that it has often been said erroneously that he was born with his great abilities fully intact. Furthermore, some have indicated that he never had to work at his craft because genius just poured out of him effortlessly. Of course, such a declaration is pure and naïve nonsense!

Mozart may have come into this world with innate potential, but he practiced tirelessly for many hours each day, even at an age when many of today's children wouldn't yet have

mastered their ABCs. His father Leopold (competent musician that he was) prepared his oldest child Nannerl to be a fine keyboardist; and subsequently, both father and daughter taught Wolfgang, the youngest member of their family, who happened to be five years younger than his sister was.

Leopold Mozart was obsessed with a desire for material wealth. While thoughts of making money preoccupied his mind, he systematically trained both of his children to be prodigies. He dragged them across the European continent to play at the courts of kings and queens and in the grand salons of countless members of the noble classes. He expected to acquire for himself (from the lucrative careers of his offspring) a luxurious lifestyle that he apparently believed he couldn't manage to obtain exclusively through his own professional endeavors.

In Piero Melograni's biography of Mozart, the author emphatically states that the musical genius of this extraordinary composer, instrumentalist, and conductor came about solely through a lifetime of study, enormous perseverance, and dedication. As it is with any true mastery, an outward appearance of effortlessness while he performed, and the extraordinary speed he was able to maintain while composing, simply was a byproduct of his having attained an extraordinarily high degree of excellence. It therefore goes without saying that an enormous amount of practice and study definitely occupied a major portion of his life. This tends to be the case (no matter of whom we are speaking) whether the achievements being made are in the arts, sciences, athletics, or—for that matter—in anything else:

> …He [Mozart] always worked with zeal and commitment. Some people believe that music flowed from him almost spontaneously, thanks to his genius. In reality, from earliest childhood he practiced thousands of hours every year, and if later he could compose page after extraordinary page with incomparable speed, it was thanks to hard-won experience, an ability to think through the music before writing it down, and an exceptional memory…
>
> …Wolfgang began playing at the age of three. He lived in a family of musicians and heard them making music every day. He began by sitting on the bench next to his sister and putting his hands on the keyboard, almost in play—which reminds us that in many languages "playing" and "playing an instrument" use the same word. This is true in English, but also in German and French (spielen, jouer). The child Mozart took to the game of music with a passion, and soon showed extraordinary talent. Given his very young age he could not have been aware of the fact, but his play with musical instruments was

> teaching him one of life's greatest secrets: success comes only from working with passion, ease, and pleasure, as if in play. Only when we enjoy ourselves can we find the energy for the hours and hours of study, the practice, and the inevitably monotonous training that accompanies all worthwhile human activities, the arts in particular. Before a great pianist or violinist can win over the public, he or she has to have the motivation and patience to devote thousands of hours to what are called "exercises"...

As everyone who has ever pursued seriously any kind of music, meditation, mathematics, visual art, sports, or science could tell us, a specific form of repetitive daily practice often is referred to as an *exercise*. Exercising often is designed to maintain, strengthen, and improve that which we already know how to do well. But it also points out, sometimes blatantly, what we do not know even remotely and everything that we do poorly. However, once we establish a regular routine of conscious, consistent, correct, and complete exercises, then this rudimentary type of practice can become the foundation for bringing all that we do and all that we aspire to be towards mastery.

Melograni continues:

> ...Some maintain that, given Mozart's innate gifts, he would have become a great musician even without his father's help and his sister's example. They may be wrong, because it is unlikely that any individual would possess such inborn, absolute musical talent. I prefer to think that certain predispositions can be developed from childhood by familiarity with music and early training. This is exactly what happened to Mozart. As Norbert Elias has said, "He must have been exposed continually to musical stimuli, the changing sequences on the violin and the piano from the first day of his life; he heard his father, his sister and other musicians practicing and correcting their mistakes." An exceptional natural predisposition enabled Mozart to develop very early a keen sensitivity to differences in sound and to musical construction. We can only guess what his fate might have been away from the environment that surrounded him from birth.

In addition to his passion for all things musical, it is unquestionable that he also loved parties. In today's vernacular, we might say that he was a *party animal* or that he *worked hard and played hard*. Indeed, he certainly had a predisposition to gaiety in general, but this often is the norm with many individuals who have professions that are highly creative, physically

demanding, emotionally intense, and unrelentingly competitive. Some sort of mental, emotional, and physical decompression tends to be a necessary component for maintaining this type of lifestyle.

Undeniably, too much merrymaking has been the undoing of many great careers, and balance is essential to sustain such a continuously fast pace, especially for prolonged periods of time. If some have criticized Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart for being emotionally immature and also for being drawn towards excesses, we must keep in mind that he never had the chance to practice fully developing and transforming all aspects of his personality into a truly mature stage. After all, he was taken from this world at the youthful age of thirty-five. Regardless, it is well to consider that ongoing practices of imbalances and excesses often lead to manifested masteries of many dysfunctions in personal behavior, including interactions with others.

Despite all of his proclivities towards debauchery, Mozart nowadays might still be considered the quintessential freelancer. He had to make arrangements for booking concerts, advertising, and obtaining commissions for his compositional work. All necessary contacts and arrangements came largely from his own personal effort. It is reasonable to assume that he had no secretary or effective organizer other than his father to do most of these types of things for him.

Throughout his entire life, he constantly (and unsuccessfully) sought after a permanent post in some royal court. Such a position perhaps was the only obvious option available to composers at the time for securing a steady income. He solicited temporary sponsorships and was required to travel extensively.

However, traveling around eighteenth-century Europe was expensive, extremely tiring, excessively slow, and fraught with the likely dangers of robbery, disease, and death. There obviously were no emails nor were there any telephones. Back then, snail-mail truly was **snail mail**. It took forever to arrive and was highly unreliable. It was also subject to being censored frequently. Additionally, this fragile form of communication was constantly at the mercy of the vicissitudes and uncertainties of war and civil unrest.

Because there were no conference calls or Internet-video calls, he was required to go to parties, spend time in royal courts, and schmooze with the noble classes. If he wanted to obtain public acclaim and monetary gains, he continually had to solicit himself. Indeed, he better like going to parties. His career demanded it of him. This was the only effective form of networking that was available to any musician of the day.

We might not have considered this, but his practice skills were not limited to the keyboard and the writing of musical notes. On the contrary, multiple, subliminal, and unwitting practices and eventual masteries also were at work every day of his life. He consciously practiced organizing, delegating tasks to others, advertising, becoming proficient with and adapting to the countless hardships of travel, entertaining his public during performances, developing charm, exploiting his wit, wooing potential benefactors at various social events, learning and perfecting foreign languages, and cultivating countless other life skills and personality traits.

Moreover, there were the enormously influencing and confusing interactions with his overbearing, controlling, and manipulative father—and likewise with his sister. Family practice helped to create his enormous confidence while performing before royalty, even at the early age of five. But his successes—and the public attention which was donned upon him constantly—greatly overshadowed his sister's achievements and the accolades she received, so that an underlying resentment and spite also was practiced between the two of them; and perhaps these destructive traits even were *mastered* over the years.

Although his father taught Wolfgang inadvertently how to arrange concerts and socialize with the aristocracy that they both greatly resented, he also taught him paradoxically to fixate on wealth. While forever appointing himself as his youngest child's money-mongering concert manager, Leopold automatically was teaching him how to be his own fundraiser. Nonetheless, as much as the father worked for and praised Wolfgang's endless successes, he simultaneously belittled him ceaselessly. It most likely was one way of keeping control over his son's profession and the wealth that supported the entire family.

As Mozart's international career advanced, he naturally continued practicing the keyboard and composed new music at breakneck speeds. While creating increasingly grander compositions, those requiring a considerable number of performers, he was also obliged to expand his role as conductor. This was a way to insure that his groundbreaking music would reach the public consciousness, hopefully spread his renown, and (most importantly) make money!

It also meant that he must oversee endless rehearsals. He had to direct and instruct all of the musicians and other performers, the set and costume designers, the stage-crew members, and everyone else involved. He had to get across his musical and dramatic intentions to every participant of those large, collaborative works he tended to reel off in record time. It is therefore conceivable that his well-practiced masteries extended far from solely

encompassing his abilities as solo performer and composer.

From a very young age, Wolfgang had the rare opportunity to meet and study with some of the greatest musical minds in Europe. Several innovative thinkers in Western music passed on to him their enlightened ideas and their personal techniques for achieving those ideas. Without having had the exposure to these other unique minds, his own insights certainly could have been diminished seriously by such a deficiency.

II.

The two fundamental features of practice...

Now, in a lighter vein, let us jump forward to the twentieth century. A renowned violinist frequently gave concerts for ocean voyagers on cruise ships.[6] After one of his triumphant performances, a well-meaning woman approached him afterwards and grabbed both of his hands. She exclaimed to him:

> Darling, I wish that you were residing in the rooms next to mine. I would love to listen to you practice all day! Instead, I'm forced to endure the feeble attempts of some dilettante who can't seem to play faster than a snail moves. He simply drones on with incredibly long, toneless, mechanical notes. And his dreadful attempts at playing last for hours at a time. He drives me absolutely crazy!

The violinist looked at her sympathetically and inquired what the number of her

[6] Many years ago, I was told that the story recounted here actually happened to the violinist Sir Yehudi Menuhin. He was an inspiring performer whom I admired greatly since my early childhood. However, I more recently heard that this tale allegedly was about another violinist. Regardless, Menuhin did perform as soloist on many concert cruises, so it is not unlikely that this incident—or something similar to it—actually happened to him. It nevertheless is plausible that someone else had the experience. Aside from these two possibilities, such a story could also be nothing more than a fable concocted by a desperate music teacher, with hopes of inspiring an impetuous student to practice more slowly and carefully. In any case, this account points out common misconceptions and false assumptions regarding practice and talent.

stateroom was. After she told him where she was staying, he admitted with an air of regret in his voice:

> Madam, it **is** I who resides next to you.

This anecdote patently demonstrates how many are unaware of what is involved in the practice of mastery. When we look at a great cathedral or skyscraper, most of us would concede that they were created with enormous effort, work, and sacrifice. They are products of collective practices and masteries, including those in architecture, engineering, manufacturing, and in the countless forms of artisanship and building skills.

Yet, while witnessing individual performances and exhibitions of master musicians, artists, actors, and athletes, some of us conclude that such amazing feats of mastery occur solely from sources other than each performer's endless efforts. Remarkable performances of any kind are merely great cathedrals and skyscrapers in motion. Not unlike other physical creations, they too require the slow, arduous, unglamorous task of laying brick after brick; developing and applying one subtle, intangible skill after another; and reinforcing those skills over and over again—oftentimes for years and decades.

The woman on the cruise ship falsely assumed that if her rooms were in close proximity to those of the great violinist, she would be entertained daily and inspired for hours. She imagined that she could have her own private recital, ongoing and free of charge! Needless to say, she was seriously disappointed to discover that the brick building of his personal violin practice included grueling, extensive, repetitive work.

Masterful practice of any kind occasionally might appear mechanical, boring, and even amateurish to the uninitiated. Depending on what stage of preparation and the type of individual approach that violinist's practice entailed at the time, his process might have seemed more like a pile of rocks and a bucket of cement than luminous, audible edifices that the unsuspecting woman anticipated and desired. But without inexhaustible quantities of those rocks and cement, no lofty towers can ever be constructed.

Regularly, there are two perspectives to all practice: teaching and learning. Even that woman on the cruise ship inadvertently learned something very important while merely having a casual conversation with her concert-violinist neighbor. His admission of being the seemingly uninspired and talentless violin player practicing next door perhaps taught her (or hopefully so) that a virtuoso's practice routine could be unlike what so many of us otherwise would have

expected.

Just as we can intentionally or unintentionally practice teaching others, we can also teach ourselves. We practice learning from ourselves—including our physical selves and our internal domain. Additionally, we also practice learning from others and our external surroundings. Beyond that, it is possible for us to learn as we practice teaching; and conversely, we often teach as our practice of learning continues. Both teaching and learning can be practiced either directly or indirectly.

Internally, we teach ourselves and learn from ourselves through practicing an infinite number of thoughts and emotions in countless ways. With those practiced thoughts and emotions,[7] we practice further by repetitively acting and reacting both internally and externally. These practices could encompass feeling, sensing, desiring, reflecting, meditating, envisioning, dreaming, daydreaming, dialoguing, obsessing, observing, and doing.

Externally, we teach by example, learn by imitating, or both teach and learn through any number of interactions that are physical, emotional, intellectual, or intuitive. Furthermore, we practice through combining any of those physical, emotional, intellectual, or intuitive activities.

Teaching or learning can be an exclusively external or wholly internal practice. Either might shift between what is in our outer world and what is within. In addition, each may transpire simultaneously in both environments. And as always, every practice is conscious or unconscious, consistent or inconsistent, correct or incorrect, and complete or incomplete.

The practices of teaching and learning are frequently interconnected overall. Certainly, at least once in each of our lives, it happened that we could not help noticing how when we practiced learning something in a consistently dedicated manner, an appropriate teacher just happened to manifest out of the blue and instructed us on how we might improve even further whatever we were learning at the time. Indeed, who hasn't heard the old adage that reminds everyone of such a phenomenon?

When the student is ready the teacher will appear.

Although this saying is sometimes attributed to Lao-tzu,[8] the actual author may have

[7] Practiced thoughts and emotions simply are those we repeat over again, not unlike everything else we practice.

[8] Lao-tzu (or using the recent, twenty-first century transliteration Laozi) was an ancient Chinese philosopher considered to be the founder of Taoism. Legend indicates that he was born in 601 BCE in Chujen village in the state of Chu. He is believed to have reached at least the age of seventy, because it is said that he departed from his community and headed west—never to return. Once he departed, his whereabouts were unknown thereafter and the final portion of his life remains a

lived much more recently. There is also an accompanying phrase that is often neglected to be mentioned:

When the student is truly ready…The teacher will Disappear.

Many modern educators have disagreed emphatically with both of these observations. Today's teaching professionals often consider both statements to be archaic, misguided, and simplistic. If we observe many of the students enrolled in our current-day academic programs, it isn't difficult to find any number of instructors attempting to teach students who are neither willing nor ready to be taught—regardless of the teachers obviously *appearing* in their lives. And teachers normally do not *disappear* whenever their students perform in an outstanding fashion. The only time when anyone customarily vanishes from the scene is when students graduate or drop out of their classes—or when teachers retire or transfer to another job. Therefore, those of us who interpret either of these proverbs in this literal and possibly obtuse manner will never find it possible to see any semblance of truth resonating from them.

Sad to say, those who ever reacted to these words in this manner also seem to be missing the point altogether. Granted, there is a palpable and pragmatic side to either proverb that some may interpret literally, but perhaps considerably more subtle and mysterious ideas are also being conveyed. Many of them tend to be incomprehensible and ultimately unattainable to the inexperienced and uninitiated.

When first disclosing these two particular adages concerning students acquiring—and later relinquishing—their ideal teacher at the appropriate moments in their lives, it is certain that Lao-tzu was describing the enigmatic phenomenon of a truly *apposite* teacher seeming to manifest almost magically whenever anyone was unequivocally prepared to accept the knowledge and wisdom that their newfound master might disclose. He then explained that this venerable teacher must fade from sight once the student *was truly ready* (after perfecting, outgrowing, or completely rejecting all of what had been learned up to that instant).

However, when we examine these simple tenets sufficiently—so as to broaden our understanding of how the mind garden actually functions—we might come to realize that the appropriate teacher appearing in our lives is not necessarily an actual or *official* teacher at all.

---

mystery to this day.

However, some modern historians disagree with this account and suggest that rather he lived in the 4th century BCE during the Warring State period. If this actually were to be the case, then the earlier claims about his age obviously would be invalidated.

It just might be our best friend, our spouse, a parent, an acquaintance, a passerby, an adversary, or perhaps not a human teacher at all.

Instead, our suitable mentor could possibly be a pet, a wild animal, the small voice emanating out of mystical and inexplicable encounters, a miraculous healing, tragic situations, puppies being born, witnessing a death, the mundane workday, a mountaintop, the neighborhood park bench, a sitting-rock overlooking our favorite waterfall, or thunderous seawater crashing upon the shoreline. All of these have the potential of being the perfect teacher at the proper time.

But it doesn't matter who or what steps forward to teach us at any given moment. If we look at these situations simply as functions taking place within the mind garden, then it will be easy to remind ourselves that such occasions are nothing other than part of the limitless manifestations of thought. Whatever *thought seeds* we have chosen to plant and cultivate metaphorically speaking, by persistently practicing them until a suitable outcome appears, any teacher who has been assisting us along the way may no longer be essential and will seem to disappear magically at the proper time. It is essential to remember that not only the situations where teachers and students interact together are expressions of thought but the teachers and students themselves are manifestations of thought as well.

Regardless, any *appearances* of teachers and the subsequent relationships between those mentors and their students have the capacity for being either dichotomous or unifying. Without nurturing any interaction exclusively within the fulcrum of divine love, oneness, and balance, only dualistic weeds will develop.

Nevertheless, whenever we select, sow, and fertilize individual and group thoughts, it is from those thoughts that every idea, emotion, intention, belief, action, event, circumstance, and all other material and nonmaterial manifestations evolve. Everything that is seen or unseen exists because of thought. The entirety of the mind garden has been created from thought, by the teaching and learning of thought, and through the practiced ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions fashioned from thought.

III.

Learning by imitation: monkey see, monkey do...

Here is an intriguing illustration revealing an almost-immediate change in human intelligence, while test subjects unconsciously practiced *learning* through imitation. Depending on what they were given to imitate, signs of their becoming smarter or less smart became readily apparent. Simply by observing, thinking, and imitating various behaviors of others brought about significant changes in their own behavior and abilities. In each case, imitation by itself was the practice. Neuroscientist Marco Iacoboni recounts these experiments in his book *Mirroring People:*[9]

> ...imitation takes many forms, and some of these forms are highly complex. Ap Dijksterhuis, a social psychologist from Holland, draws a distinction between the complex forms of imitation he calls the imitation "high road," as opposed to the "low road" of straightforward motor imitation (grasping the cup, for example). Regarding his high road, Dijksterhuis gathered an impressive array of behavioral data confirming various forms of mimicry in human behavior. Let me give you just one fascinating example. In a series of experiments, one group of participants was asked to think about college professors, who are typically associated with intelligence, and write down everything that came to mind, and a second group was asked to do the same regarding soccer hooligans—those unruly and destructive fans who are typically associated with stupidity (or at least with very stupid behavior). Then both groups were asked a series of "general knowledge" questions, a task ostensibly unrelated to the first one. But it turned out that there was a relationship: the participants who had concentrated earlier on college professors *outperformed* the participants who had been thinking about soccer hooligans. Indeed, the "college professor" participants outperformed a control group that came fresh to the general knowledge questions, and this control group in turn outperformed the "soccer hooligan" participants.

[9] The complete title is *Mirroring People: The Science of Empathy and How We Connect with Others.*

> Conclusion: just thinking about college professors makes you smarter, whereas thinking about soccer hooligans makes you dumber! Ap Dijksterhuis summarizes his research by saying, "Relevant research has shown by now that imitation can make us slow, fast, smart, stupid, good at math, bad at math, helpful, rude, polite, long-winded, hostile, aggressive, cooperative, competitive, conforming, nonconforming, conservative, forgetful, careful, careless, neat, and sloppy."

This is something to consider when small children (or anyone else, for that matter) are exposed continuously to certain types of movies and television programs, and to social media and various other aspects of the Internet as well. When we allow ourselves to view repeatedly the atrocities on nightly news and the excessive violence, manipulation, deceit, rudeness, and lasciviousness that are displayed on weekly TV series and reality shows, what type of subliminal changes are manifesting in our own behavior? What types of behaviors are we adopting simply by imitating whatever we see before us?

In both the ambits of fictional storytelling and non-fictional accounting, today's champions are often depicted in multiple shades of grey. They frequently lie, cheat, steal, and murder as much as the bad guys do, but their motives are seen as being somehow more just or (at least) more justifiable. Remember, these examples are being pumped into our psyches on a daily basis; and since many of us spend more time interacting with our multimedia shows than with anyone in our physical lives, don't these questionable characters—and the situations they find themselves in—essentially have the capacity for being today's role models for many of us?

This is in stark contrast to storytelling of earlier generations. At least the heroes and villains were normally portrayed as being clearly defined archetypes epitomizing either good or evil exclusively. Villains and heroes used to be portrayed as being different as black and white; and in both theater and film, costumes of the *good guys* were often mostly white (or light-colored) while the bad guys wore a good deal of black. Overall set design also used light and dark variances in color to represent the influences of either virtue and hope or malevolence and destruction.

Although certain audience members have certainly come to imitate villainous characters as well as the heroic ones, there still were fairly obviously visual differences in the opposing characters to assist us in distinguishing between the positive and negative attributes displayed

throughout any film or theatrical presentation created in earlier decades. Consequently, the types of characteristics someone might be inclined to imitate were more clearly defined than when viewing presentations created more recently. Nowadays, the heroic qualities we may possibly wind up absorbing into our personalities could easily be mixed up into a hodgepodge of subliminal forms of trickery and deceit as well.

Aside from the powerful influences storytelling can bestow upon us, this same type of influence also can be seen when considering the widespread effects of current propaganda news channels—those which literally reject accurate reporting and real facts on a nonstop basis. The blatant lies and subterfuge that are spewed endlessly on such media platforms have the sole agenda to poison public opinion about any legitimate news shows, those which oppose and expose a wide variety of disinformation as being propaganda vehicles for an elite few. It is through methods such as these that the most influential and privileged among us use the potency of repetition and imitation to literally refashion the attitudes and beliefs of countless individuals for gaining a more universal control over regional, national, and international politics, finances, and (presumably) power.

Aside from how media can ultimately impact the entire human race, what about the effects of environmental influences upon us like poverty, disease, contamination and pollution, crime, brutality, war, repression, victimization, and countless other forms of oppression? Indeed, they influence the overall behavior (including the subsequent thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions) of hundreds of millions or even billions of individuals around the world continuously. Can we even imagine how vast segments of society would behave alternatively without having been subjected to continuous onslaughts of horrors and strife—the endless struggles compelling them to react repeatedly or even imitate in adverse ways?

That being said, we must return once more to consider the pervasive effects of mass communication by seriously examining how manipulation, trickery, deception, and even fraud are found in the countless assortments of advertisements and partisan campaigns. These assaults on facts and authenticity are specifically and (in many cases) scientifically designed to sway our views, subsequent actions, and overall attitudes. The producers of any type of media hype make enormous monetary investments in such products because they know how constant exposure to the same information can and does alter how people think, react, and behave—

compelling at least a certain percentage of viewers to imitate the desired responses suggested by ads and political propaganda. They are very aware of results that are similar to those discovered in the experiments of Ap Dijksterhuis and others.

When I was very young, children's television programs were considerably different from those being broadcasted today. Kids cast on those earlier shows consistently were soft-spoken, polite, unassuming, and well-behaved. The overall atmosphere of yesterday's programming seemed subdued in comparison to what is being shown on the airwaves currently. Even when those kids from several decades past were expressing enthusiastic approval by cheering, the general tone was still much softer than nowadays.

The current crop of these programs seem as though the volume of every television set has been turned up drastically without our permission. Most of today's shows tend to be noisier in every respect, and their tempo also has accelerated. It is as though we were watching our favorite programs while some unknown universal remote control has denied us access to slowing down the TV's current speed stuck in fast-forward. Additionally, every audio switch seems to have been permanently adjusted to transmit louder music, louder sound effects, and louder dialogue.

While all of this is happening, the scripts that the current *TV kids* are following apparently allow them to act out in ways that used to be considered as raucous and rude. In reaction to my remarks expressed here, there certainly are some who might say that such commentary simply reflects an old-fashioned mindset stemming from inflexible attitudes unwilling to change with the times. However, I am stating these things not to express my personal opinion, but only to convey simple observations. I often have heard others mention these things countless times before it ever occurred to me to begin taking notice of them myself.

Since I have worked with countless children throughout my teenage and adult life, I certainly have witnessed their immediate shift into boisterous behavior just after having viewed certain types of television shows. Since the introduction of a rowdier style of kids' programming on TV, there does seem to be a substantial alteration in the general attitude and behavior of kids imitating those apparent changes.

It also might be noted that when I have seen parents try to get their children to watch some of the earlier, more sedate shows, the predominant reaction isn't one of enthusiasm. Instead, protests seem to be almost a universal response. Their complaints tend to indicate that the older programs now are no longer seen as interesting or entertaining, but rather as

being *boring* and *stupid*. If we seriously consider the results of Ap Dijksterhuis' experiments mentioned earlier, mightn't these newer programming models actually be teaching radically different thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors that many of our young people are imitating today?

Indeed, they do! It is a well-known fact that all of us tend to reproduce the repetitive social habits, physical gestures, verbal expressions, political messaging, ethical (or unethical) convictions, and preferences in music, art, food, and fashion of those with whom we spend time regularly. This form of *role-modeling practice* or imitation occurs regardless of where our everyday comrades and *heroes* reside. They influence us at home, in school, at work, within the confines of a television show, while interacting with electronic games, or even as we watch a YouTube video on the Internet. Equally, they can also impact us from within the pages of our favorite stories or upon the lyrics of our well-loved songs to which we listen over and over again.

It is important to recognize that these powerful changes can be made in us solely because we are practicing them through imitation. Watching the same TV shows with the same themes, the same beliefs, and the same interactions can be seen as unconscious, repetitive practice. As this repetition continues, we actually might start duplicating some of those themes, beliefs, and interactions within our own lives. Undeniably, we are often rehearsing unconsciously thoughts of loudness, rudeness, abruptness, trickery, violence, and deceit along with a multitude of other brands of duplicitous thinking—those which we may or may not wish to integrate into what we have always considered to be the distinct personality of our separate and individual identities.

Granted, many of us perceive ourselves as being well-insulated psychologically against the effects of such repetitious, subliminal, and passive forms of sensory input. We have often been indoctrinated previously with exceptionally strong, rational beliefs that compartmentalize what we see and experience through the media. We have already been convinced that these exposures are not a part of our reality and do not affect us in any way.

Such well-rehearsed beliefs indeed may counter the unintentional practices we initiate unconsciously while watching television, viewing an Internet video, playing computer games, going out to see a movie, or even watching some political pundit rant on and on about something that may or may not be true. Consequently, can any of us actually be certain that we are impervious to these attempts at repetitive thought and behavior modifications one-hundred percent of the time? Indeed, there are still those who do demonstrate noticeable susceptibility to this sort of exposure and readily display obvious changes in their attitudes and conduct.

Many years ago, I accompanied a couple of friends to an opening-night viewing of *The*

Terminator at a movie theater in central New Hampshire. Just after we had purchased our tickets, it happened that all of the seating had just been sold out. Consequently, the dozens of people who were still in line behind us had to leave the queue and head for home. Many did this with noticeable disappointment and frustration.

Because we were among those who purchased the final tickets in the house, the only seats remaining were in the row furthest back and nearest to the lobby entrance. This actually wound up to be a fortunate thing after all, because we were able to vacate quickly at the end of the film and return to the car before most others started milling out into the parking lot.

As the final credits were still playing, we decided it would be prudent to get up from our seats and vacate the building before anyone else had a chance to do so. Just as the three of us were about to pile into my car, we suddenly heard violent shouting and screaming emanating from the sizable crowd collecting right outside the theater entrance. A fist fight apparently erupted between two young men; but within seconds, dozens of other people joined in the brawl.

Almost instantly, the situation leapt out of control and soon transformed into an unbelievable free-for-all. Within a few minutes, more than a half-dozen police cruisers came thundering towards the movie house with sirens blaring and flashing lights ablaze. Then, several officers jumped out of their cars with guns pointed in the direction of the crowd. It was certainly a tense moment for everyone there, including those of us who were simply distant bystanders.

Several days after the incident, I overheard two policemen discussing what had happened while they were munching on burgers at a local luncheonette. One of them happened to be at the scene and said that there really was no dispute about how the ruckus started. He simply stated:

> Everybody seemed to be so pumped up from the movie that the extra adrenaline apparently blew everything out of control…and then all hell broke loose.

It is important to note here that *The Terminator* is a heart-pounding, futuristic action-thriller accompanied by an equally driving musical score.[10] Additionally, an endless barrage of persistent, deafening sound effects further reinforce and heighten the potency of its

[10] According to *Wikipedia*:

> The Terminator is a 1984 American science fiction film directed by James Cameron. It stars Arnold Schwarzenegger as the Terminator, a cyborg assassin sent back in time from 2029 to 1984 to kill Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton), whose son will one day become a savior against machines in a post-apocalyptic future.

unrelentingly fierce action. Despite this, by today's standards many people consider the film to be relatively tame in comparison to more recent movies in the same or similar genres, even though certain aspects of this violent film were considered by many as being unprecedented at the time. These considerations only support the theory that all types of media continually become more violent and sensationalistic year after year, decade after decade, as people adapt and become used to the level of thrills and violence to which they are being exposed.

More than a century ago on May 29, 1913, another example of this seemingly reflexive sort of imitation literally erupted during the debut performance of Igor Stravinsky's then-controversial ballet *Le Sacre du Printemps*. It was held in Paris at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. That infamous production of his *Rite of Spring* is known to be the most recognized of all musical unveilings in history.

I was first introduced to this particular composition (and subsequently to the debut performance) during a music literature class in high school. My teacher gleefully informed all of us that the premiere of *Le Sacre* actually started a riot in the concert hall. After being amused further by our apparent reactions of amazement and disbelief, he then went on to read from an account written by an audience member who experienced the chaos firsthand.

There was one particular thing mentioned in the account that has stuck in my mind for over a half-century. The writer expressed how overwhelmed he had become by the intensity of thrashing, relentless rhythms blasting through the theater. He even thought that those savage beats were giving him enormous pain just above his neck—an acute headache which seemed to be throbbing along with the ferocious movement of the music. This was his brief assessment until he suddenly realized that someone sitting directly behind him was savagely keeping the beat to the music by pounding both fists upon his head!

These are only a few examples of how people can readily and rapidly transform while they appear to be imitating the drastic, intensifying shift in any situation that they are experiencing collectively. Just think of what has been happening during the early part of this new millennium. Disinformation across the globe continues rising to evermore dizzying heights than at almost any other time in recent history, insisting (often viciously) that its heinous lies are indeed factual while the actual truth is categorically false.

It was both amusing and alarming to me when a former White House spokesperson actually tried to justify the presiding president's outrageous claims—which otherwise could be seen only as the mendacities that they truly were. Instead, she fallaciously emphasized their

validity by referring to them as *alternative facts*.

Furthermore, ever since that particular president initially ran for office, he kept demonizing most members of the free press—those who kept pointing out and exposing his non-stop lying—by falsely accusing them as being the disseminators of *fake news*. Moreover, he bragged incessantly that this little two-word expression was of his own invention. However, in Madeleine Albright's bestseller *Fascism: A Warning*, the author points to Benito Mussolini (Italy's fascist dictator from 1925–1945) as the actual architect of the phrase.[11]

The rising Italian dictator accused the journalists of the day of being *fake*—in order to delegitimize the national press and subsequently replace it with his own propaganda machine. After all, journalists were the foremost watchdogs exposing corruption and tyranny in general, and (more specifically) Mussolini's step-by-step conversion of their society into his own personalized brand of autocracy. And in more recent times, the term *fake news* has been revived by an American president who used it to discredit all media platforms that disagreed with anything that he said or did—even when his ever-morphing falsehoods and inconsistencies were captured on video and broadcast internationally for everyone to witness.

Consequently, *fake news* has now become a bona fide cliché. As a relentless catchphrase, it has been regurgitated all over the globe. Because of its recent resurrection back into mainstream consciousness, this infamous little saying has been undeniably returned to destroy the power of the free press and reputable journalism altogether.

Its malevolent goal has always been to infect a continually increasing segment of the population with doubt and distrust by claiming that genuine and verifiable news is inherently fake while unproveable *alternative facts* are real and should be accepted on face value—regardless. We must consider how attitudes and beliefs of millions of people have been seriously manipulated and perhaps altered permanently. As we proceed onward through each upcoming decade, those countless, indoctrinated individuals will continue to imitate, practice, and propagate further (with well-entrenched emotionalizations of fear, prejudice, and hate) the well-calculated directives borne of such deviously construed fabrications.

Up until now, we have discussed exclusively the effects that our *human* thoughts have on physical reality—for better or for worse. But what about thoughts practiced by other species?

[11] Madeleine Albright (1937–2022) was an American diplomat who served as the United States Secretary of State from 1997 to 2001. She also served on the National Security Council, was a professor at Georgetown University, became an ambassador to the United Nations, and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012.

Many of us still believe that conscious and deliberate forms of thinking is exclusively a human enterprise. However, over the past several decades, animal behaviorists have come to accept more readily that animals also think and feel in similar ways.[12]

Among several animal groups that were studied, some of them indeed have demonstrated conscious thinking known as a *theory of mind*.[13] Unquestionably, these findings support a common consensus arrived at throughout the years by many pet owners, veterinarians, animal trainers, those who have lived where contact with wild animals is frequent, and countless individuals who—in various other capacities and situations—have interacted with both domesticated and untamed animals on an ongoing basis.

Regardless of our beliefs concerning who (or what) can (or cannot) think, thoughts are omnipresent. These seeds of manifestation dwell everywhere in the mind garden. They forever reside within us and all around us. The degree to which anyone or anything is capable of thinking is related directly to the types of practice used while responding to thoughts and to the infinite manifestations those thoughts create.

IV.

Schooldays for Alexander-the-Dog...

At this juncture, it would be appropriate for me to speak of Alex and his remarkable life of well-practiced imitation. For almost sixteen years, he lived with me until just after his unfortunate and ultimately fatal accident in 2007. He was my student, my teacher, and one of my closest friends. Alex was a constant companion and lived side-by-side with me longer than anyone else, including every member of my immediate family.

[12] In the March 2008 issue of *National Geographic Magazine*, the cover story, "Inside Animal Minds", describes several studies investigating the cognitive abilities of various animal species.

[13] The understanding of another individual's perspective.

I first met him a few days after he was born; and when he was only three months old, I brought him home to reside with me on a permanent basis. He came from a litter of twelve puppies. Initially, I considered getting another pup to keep him company while I was busy working or when I had to be away from the house.

Only one of his sisters was similar to Alex in size and temperament. I thought she would be the most suitable companion for him out of all his siblings. Her overall appearance was nearly identical to his. Both of them had smooth, shiny, black, Lab-like coats. They also had white bibs on their chests and delicate, white tips on their front paws. All the other members of that litter were much more wooly and jowly. Their fur was duller, totally black, and without any markings.

Sadly, that special sister left with someone else just before I decided on acquiring a second dog. So rather than selecting still another from the brood to be Alex's playmate, I came to the conclusion that training one dog probably was enough of an added responsibility for me at the time.

Yet, if I had been successful in attaining the *girl-pup* as Alex's counterpart, I was planning to call the duo, *Fanny and Alexander*, after the children starring in Ingmar Bergman's[14] film with the same name. Playing the title roles in that movie were a young Danish brother and sister. They were dressed in traditional, black costumes of the period and wore large, black hats. Additionally, white vests were revealed partially underneath their black cloaks. When the two puppies sat side-by-side, there was a remarkable and comical resemblance to those Danish children.

However, it soon became apparent that Alex's sister wouldn't be accompanying him after all. Standing alone, the name *Alexander* (without *Fanny* to complement it) was too formal for my exceptionally energetic puppy. So I decided to shorten his appellation simply to *Alex*. Nonetheless, whenever he carried himself in an especially regal and noble fashion, it seemed more than appropriate to christen him occasionally with the most noble of names: *Alexander the Great*.

Fanny and Alex were products of a *mixed marriage*. The mother had white fur with brown

[14] Swedish film and theater director.

patches. She was half Labrador Retriever,[15] one-quarter Newfoundland,[16] and one-quarter Saint Bernard.[17] Their father had no markings and was a purebred yellow Lab.[18] Regardless, the litter from which Fanny and Alex came consisted only of black puppies.

Although Alexander the Great mostly resembled a Lab, he was unusually long and tall for that variety of dog. This certainly was due to the very large Newfoundland and Saint Bernard breeds also found in his bloodline.

The day Alex came home with me was the day we began a regular practice routine. For over two years, seven days per week, we practiced for a minimum of thirty minutes daily. After that, we still continued practicing but no longer maintained a quotidian schedule. By the end of his nearly sixteen years of residing on this planet, Alex could respond to well over a hundred commands, he had a vocabulary of at least three hundred fifty words, he recognized several people and other pets by name, he could identify and respond to every number from one to ten by barking the appropriate number of times in quick succession, and he often was able to anticipate many of my instructions before I even spoke them aloud. (This particular ability became more apparent later in life.)

Our initial training commenced with endless repetition. I would say his name every time I wanted his attention. Then I would state a command in an unwavering, resolute, deep voice. However, when any vocal instructions were not spoken strongly or without an adequately low timbre, he not always would take the exercise seriously.[19] Instead, he might tease me with a series of predictable, ritualistic pranks. If this happened, it would be necessary to darken, deepen, and amplify the tone of my verbal requests to regain his interest.

---

[15] According to *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary*:

> …any of a breed of medium-sized strongly built retrievers largely developed in England from stock originating in Newfoundland and having a short dense black, yellow or chocolate coat and a thick rounded tail—called also *Lab, Labrador*.

[16] According to *Merriam-Webster*:

> …any of a breed of very large heavy highly intelligent black, black-and-white, brown, or gray dogs having a thick coat and probably developed in Newfoundland.

[17] Also, according to *Merriam-Webster*:

> …any of a Swiss alpine breed of tall powerful dogs used especially formerly in aiding lost travelers.

[18] A clipped form of *Labrador Retriever*.

[19] Dogs readily employ higher-pitched sounds to incite or engage in play, except when their vocalizations are reactions to sudden pain or fright. Lower tones tend to indicate more serious interactions. When training a dog, it is recommended to speak firmly and deeply. Using a high vocal pitch to state commands often yields unsuccessful results. Dogs frequently do not take this type of request seriously. A common reaction would be either for the dog to ignore the command altogether or to defy it by reacting in a teasing, playful manner.

Once his focus was restored our practice would continue. Commands such as *sit*, *stay*, *lie down*, *sit back up* (resuming a sitting position after lying down) and *sit up* (raising his front paws and the front portion of his body upward with his hind quarters still seated on the ground) were mastered very quickly.[20] However, commands such as *heel*, *speak* (barking on command), and getting him to identify and *speak* each number from one through ten took enormous amounts of repetition.

For example, the procedure I used to teach him to *speak* was as follows. First I would say:

Alex, speak.

Then I would pause for several seconds to see whether he might respond. Finally, I would imitate a dog barking with a very animated *woof*. The first day I repeated this process over three hundred times in succession before he responded with a single bark. As soon as he *spoke* successfully, I lavished him with enormous praise and rewarded him with an hour of roughhousing—his favorite pastime.

When we practiced again the following day, he reacted correctly to the *speak* command after slightly more than one hundred attempts. On the third day he *spoke* on the twentieth try; and on the fourth day he responded to my command straight away. We continued practicing in this manner every day for months, to reinforce his ability to respond immediately.

As his prize for practicing well, we would end each good practice with extended playtime together. Also, after responding well to a command, quiet praise from me always gave him great satisfaction. Seldom was he given *treats* for a reward. Only when he demonstrated something exceptional did I occasionally surprise him with a dog biscuit.

I have witnessed many unsuccessful attempts to train dogs with eatable rewards. Granted, there are those who advocate offering treats along with verbal praise whenever their

---

[20] For some unknown reason, asking Alex to *sit up* always excited him excessively. Whenever attempting to perform this particular task, he regularly catapulted himself upward with a disproportionate amount of strength and speed. As his body grew larger, his physical capacity also increased considerably. After one very noticeable growth spurt, his exceedingly animated eagerness combined with massive brawn produced an astonishing result. He completely overturned himself in midair, abruptly smashing onto the ground.

This unforeseen outcome truly startled both of us. After flipping over several times in succession, even while I attempted to assist him, he began refusing to perform the task. For months I endeavored to persuade him into trying it again, but he never would comply. Only after I began tucking both my feet under his seated rump while using my hands to support his upper body did he lose his reluctance to attempt the position once more. However, even after he was able to respond successfully on his own, I still had to stand behind him as he elevated his torso. Despite persuading him to raise his body more calmly, he often forgot the gentler approach while his excitable nature continued frequently to take over. Luckily, I always remained behind him, serving as an ever-diligent and often-needed *safety net*.

dogs accomplish any assigned task. Some trainers even adhere to this method.

However, if food is used as regular recompense for good performance, dogs frequently fixate on obtaining treats rather than focusing on the practice at hand. This creates a sizable distraction that often leads to chronically undesirable behavior. They can become obstinate and refuse to continue practicing until they receive their *reward*. This reaction is not unlike that of human children refusing to comply until after having received an expected bribe.

Wanting to avoid such behavior in Alex, I never gave him material rewards recurrently. Instead, infrequent treats were offered to him only after an outstanding accomplishment. This approach seemed to kindle in him an eagerness to concentrate and perform well consistently.

Sometimes it was apparent that he still had a strong desire to receive more eatable treats immediately. But because there was no way of knowing when and whether the next *goody* might arrive, these two minor uncertainties gave him an incentive to perform well at all times. Therefore, he more readily gave his full attention to each practice session.

For the first few years of his life, we lived in a cottage on a large farm in Vermont less than a mile from the New Hampshire border. Behind our house was a cornfield, and further down the hill was a sizable pond. Alex swam there nearly every day until the end of autumn when the water would freeze completely solid.

During the warmer months I loved to row across the water. Daily, I adhered to a regular route that circumnavigated the main, central area of the pond. Each of my jaunts consisted of three laps, totaling a distance of over three miles. Alex would wait patiently on an elevated bank overlooking the water. I would tell him to *sit and stay*. He carefully watched every move I made as I prepared the boat for launch. As soon as I left the shore, Alex eagerly awaited my instructions to *break*. This was the call I used to release him from the *sit and stay* position or from any other assignment. The moment I uttered that final command, he would blast off like a rocket and thunder down to the pond's edge.

Every day we performed such a rite. Once he reached a sizable mound adjoining the water, he would leap high off of it and plunge into his much-loved puddle with an incredible blast of profound wetness. Immediately thereafter, the objective was to swim furiously as possible until he rejoined my procession-of-one. Then he would follow me for the rest of our two-mile journey, ceaselessly snorting and sputtering water along the way.

Only occasionally did he deviate from this regular routine. Periodically, there were two magnificent blue herons that swam on the lake. Whenever they were present Alex would leave

the rowboat to visit those splendid creatures. He seemed to love his *feathered friends* just as he seemed to love all else in life. He would circle each of them and then they in turn would circle him. The birds never seemed to be threatened by him. Instead, they performed this circling routine every time he swam out to greet them. Once they completed this aquatic dance, Alex would chug vigorously back to rejoin our rowing expedition.

There were several instances after his returning to the boat when the herons took flight a few minutes later. Once above ground they always came directly to wherever we happened to be at the time. Then ceremoniously, each of them would make a stately, low-lying, circular swoop around our little parade before flying off to their next destination.

Alex never tired of the water, nor did he tire of the game of fetching sticks; and when the fetching took place in water, his happiness doubled. There was one particular mountain pool beneath a forty-foot waterfall where he always insisted that I throw sticks into the water for him to retrieve.

If he were feeling especially exuberant, he would drag to me enormous branches that might be up to twenty-five feet in length. Often they were too thick at the base for him to hold in his mouth; but cleverly, he figured out that he should go to the opposite end of these logs and tug from where they were thin enough for him to grab. He sometimes had to haul these humongous twigs across boulders and other obstacles. Occasionally, they would get stuck before he could tow them to the pool's edge.

It was greatly amusing for me to witness his continual orbiting around these wedged prizes, trying to figure out how to move them again. Amazingly, more often than not, he discovered a way to accomplish those missions all by himself. However, if he couldn't find a solution, he then would approach me and bark in a unique manner that was used only when he wanted help with something.

When I pulled on any of his treasured branches to release them, he often became so excited that he would try assisting me. However, I frequently had to tell him to back away (another feat he could execute on command) so that I might finish the task without accidentally heaving any of those huge logs onto a bouncing, unpredictable target-of-a-dog.

Once his beam was free, Alex would resume a purposeful log-dragging to the edge of the pool. As soon as he completed this arduous undertaking, he would call to me with another unique bark that was his single outcry for me to throw this monstrous piece of fallen deadwood into the churning flood.

I never threw the larger ones, because they were too heavy for him to pull out of the water. Instead, I preferred to locate a stick that was more reasonable in size and throw that one below the waterfall. As soon as I hurled any stick airborne, twirling over the frigid bath, he would fly into the pool and doggedly dash after his prize. Once he found the cherished branch, he would position it in his mouth and immediately return to shore.

After scrambling onto dry land, Alex always took a moment to shake the water vigorously off of his body before bringing me the stick. Then he would stare at me intently until I again tossed it back into the frosty tub. Our game usually continued for dozens of throws, but the most tosses I ever counted during one bout was one hundred fifty. This record-breaking session lasted for hours; and I finally had to refrain from playing with him so that we could resume hiking up the mountain before darkness set in.

Alex always seemed as though he could persist in fetching anything forever. He exuded sheer joy as I heaved one projectile after another into the pool for him. At times like these, there could be no denying that he most certainly was a bona fide retriever.

Because he adored water, Alex often wanted to enter the house while he was still soaking wet, sometimes being extremely dirty as well. There were several useful commands I always employed on such occasions. First, I would say to him:

Alex, you're very wet. Shake that body for me!

Or on other occasions I simply would say:

Alex, shake.

Immediately, he responded with explosive volleys of vigorous bodily vibrations.

However, there were sporadic instances when he was much less energetic and would respond only with an assortment of unenthusiastic wriggles. When this occurred, I had to become more animated and ask him again. Once he achieved an effective shake, then I would praise him and ask him to wipe his paws on the mat inside the front door. Intermittently, I might substitute *paws* with the word *feet*.[21] Although it was extremely difficult for him to perform these movements (and not very effective for removing water and dirt), he seemed to enjoy practicing the awkward procedure each time I asked him to do so.

[21] Alex always responded correctly to this request, regardless of whether I indicated that he should wipe his paws or wipe his feet.

Afterwards, he customarily prepared himself for the next phase of our *getting-dry ceremony*. Automatically, he would sit on the doormat as he waited patiently for me to find a towel—one with which I could dry him more thoroughly. The moment I returned to him with a suitable old wipe, he always knew to hand me his right front paw so that I could rub clean the entire leg. He always continued to hold his paw in midair until I said:

Good boy, paw down.

Once he lowered that paw I would add:

O.K. Alex, other front paw.

Instantly, he would raise his left front paw. After that leg was dried completely, I always gave him the signal to lower the paw and resume a standing position. My final set of commands consisted of requesting him first to lift one back paw and then the other. This was extremely difficult for him to do, but he always seemed to like trying it. He never ignored or protested when I asked him to perform this demanding task. Slowly and carefully he would raise the right and left hind legs respectively. Although he couldn't raise them more than a few inches off the ground, it was high enough to facilitate my wiping each one in turn. Even though it really was challenging for him to hold up his back paws, he never lowered them until I asked for them to be lowered.

The final segment of this routine he absolutely loved. I would take the clean portion of the towel and give his entire body a vigorous rubdown. Once we were done I would open the door to the front porch. He would step outside for a quick moment and give one last lively shake before coming inside again.

There were many instances when Alex's training saved him from critical injury and even death. When he was only about five or six months old, such an occasion took place. A favorite of his pastimes was to explore the old barns nearby. Often he would discover some discarded remnants or debris and proudly carry them home to show me.

One afternoon, when I opened the front door to let him inside, I was horrified to discover that he had the sharp and jagged remains of a large, crumbling light bulb bulging out of the sides of his jaws. If he had attempted to chew or swallow any part of the object, it definitely would have shattered or even exploded inside of his mouth; and if that had happened, he certainly would have sustained serious, permanent, and possibly fatal injuries. However, he

seemed to coddle the bulb very gingerly, so it fortunately didn't splinter while he was carrying it.

I extended my hand in his direction to see if he would let me remove the precarious object from his clutches. Because of my rising concern, I reached out to him too rapidly. Unfortunately, he interpreted this gesture as a signal to play; and subsequently, he bolted off of the porch in wild delight, expecting me to chase after him. However, I was alarmed further by his response, so I called to him with great urgency in my voice, hoping that he would return immediately. Reluctantly, he obliged.

I then remembered that we had been practicing a new command for the last several days. It was to release and drop anything he happened to be holding in his mouth. Instantly, I said with a very stern voice:

Alex, drop!

At first he hesitated, but after I repeated the request with a sterner voice he complied. Gently he placed this bulb on the doormat and released it from his grasp. I quickly disposed of the item, checked him for cuts and extraneous glass fragments, and then showered him with praises for obeying the command.

Before speaking further about how Alex's training saved him from other dangers, I find it fitting to interject a brief story regarding his ability to change directions simply by his following a few, basic hand signals that I would employ. Also, I will include one other account. It describes how these *directional* gestures were used in conjunction with Alex's ability to drop anything from his mouth on command.

Whenever we were hiking, Alex's custom was to remain in the lead, regardless of where we were headed. As soon as we arrived at any backwoods intersection, he often flew enthusiastically up trails that I wasn't intending to take. After several years of venturing into wilderness areas together, and once he was capable of responding to various hand signals, I discovered a straightforward method of rerouting his misdirected, meteoric flights back into the appropriate path.

Any time he began to dart up the wrong trail, I immediately would call out his name. Once he was facing me again so I could gain his full attention, I would exclaim:

Not that way, Alex. This way!

Whenever I spoke these words, I extended one of my arms in an exaggerated fashion, pointing towards the trail I was intending to take. It didn't matter whether there were three, four, or even five routes before us. The moment I waved my hand towards the appropriate course, he was off again in a thunderous flash. However, now we both would be heading in the same direction once more.

After years of employing this type of signaling, I used it in a wide variety of situations inside of the house and out. After severe storms, it frequently was necessary to pick up large tree limbs and smaller branches that occasionally fell onto the lawn.

Whenever Alex saw me dragging branches along the ground, he immediately would become extremely excited. Thinking that this might be the perfect opportunity to incite a spontaneous game of *tug-of-war*, his inclination was to dive at the other end of my branch and begin furiously pulling it away from me.

My normal response was to say:

Alex, no tug!

Then I would point to another large branch still in the lawn and add:

Go, pick up!

After he discovered the branch in question, his response was to gleefully charge off and fetch it. However, his usual response wasn't to follow me to the debris pile in the back corner of the property. Instead, he often dragged his *stick* over portions of the lawn where the debris had already been removed.

But once I realized that all I had to do was point in the direction of the brush pile and call out to him, "Alex, this way", he was more than happy to lug his giant twig to the desired location. As soon as he reached the pile, all I needed to say was:

Alex, drop!

In an instant, he would let go of his trophy and allow it to settle in the perfect place. Then I would praise him for a job well done and quickly point to another limb. Once he spotted it, he was off like lighting to perform his next excellent task.

Considering how helpful he could be in so many situations (once I discovered the appropriate commands and practice techniques to help him master various tasks), I often

mused how I might teach him to do laundry, vacuum the house, and even cook dinner! Sad to say, I never discovered a method for showing him how he might master these things.

About ten months after the light bulb incident, we were hiking one evening in the Pemigewasset Wilderness. Just before dusk began to sift into the landscape, a fair-sized black bear emerged from out of the undergrowth. It plodded onto the trail about a hundred yards ahead of us. When Alex caught sight of him, his entire body instantly quivered with excitement and a palpable delight.

While I could see him preparing to bolt forward, I knew that he was envisioning the bear simply as the biggest possible playmate he might ever find for himself. Yet, I also knew that if he sped uncontrollably in its direction, this massive and potentially lethal creature would certainly interpret any hasty approach as an attack; and all of the countermeasures it might employ would definitely be sudden, fierce, and final—especially for such an innocent and unsuspecting dog only a fraction of its size.

Alex was already more than fifty feet in front of me, so there was no time to rush to his side, grab his collar, and firmly hold him back. As his taut, hind legs were in an ever-increasing rev, I knew he was preparing a full-throttled sprint towards the bear. There were only seconds remaining for me to bellow out the word *NO* before he would blast himself down the trail.[22]

However, the moment I yelled out in his direction, he immediately turned around to face me instead. Then, I quickly signaled him back to my side but still wasn't sure whether or not he would obey me. After all, almost the entirety of his focus was on what lie directly ahead of us. Yet, once his canine instincts gave way to the countless hours of formal training we worked on together, he dutifully came back to me—much to my great relief.

As soon as I praised him for not running away, I told him to stay at my side using the command to *heel*.[23] Heeling at my side was perhaps the most difficult task for Alex to fulfill consistently. Because his bloodline was predominantly that of a hunting dog, scents of animals

[22] *No* was one of the most essential commands Alex learned while he was a young puppy. It also was something he learned very quickly. After his vocabulary began to expand, I discovered that I could link this word to countless others, allowing me to convey more explicit ideas to him. For example, I might ask him to give me his paw. He would lift one of his front paws for me to shake. But because of his occasionally excessive enthusiasm, he often wanted to continue handing me his paw without cessation. If I responded to this exuberance by simply saying *no*, he would refrain from his handshaking only temporarily. However, a few moments later he always wanted to begin handing me his paw all over again. But when I began joining or linking the command *no* with the word *paw*, I found that he could understand my desire immediately. So when he refused to stop handing me his paw, all I needed to say to him was, "Alex, no-paw". Instantly, he would comply. Once he learned the meaning of the word *down*, he also responded to, "Alex, paw-down". Other commands linked with the word *no* to which Alex responded consistently were: *no-speak*, *no-beg*, *no-run*, *no-jump*, and *no-play*.

[23] In dog training, it is the command used to have a dog remain at one's side while walking or running together.

were a constant distraction while we were practicing outside together. Initially, it was a common occurrence for him to follow the dictates of his nose rather than following my instructions. So having him heel by my side without the restraints of a leash or harness took a long time for him to master completely.

After the bear examined us from a distance, he lazily lumbered off the trail back into the thick of trees and brush. I knew that the real test for Alex was to continue heeling while we were crossing the intersection where the bear had entered and exited the trail. As we came closer, I could see Alex's nose feverishly engaging with the scent. If he ignored my command to heel and decided to rush after the bear instead, it was apparent to me that I could keep him out of harm's way no longer.

Although he obviously was tempted to chase his nose into the woods, he resisted the enticement and continued following me. Once we had made our way well beyond the bear site, I released him from the command to heel and promptly rewarded him with an unexpected treat. He happily chomped down one of his favorite doggie biscuits for a difficult job nicely done.

Another perilous incident took place the following June, while we were hiking along a mountain brook in the heart of Franconia Notch. In this instance, my practice sessions with Alex wouldn't save him from experiencing one of the most harrowing adventures of his life. Because he chose to reject his training by ignoring my command for just a single moment, he immediately placed himself in considerable danger. Although this action could have ended tragically, his remarkable survival of the incident seemed to teach him a vital lesson. Never again did he disobey me in similar circumstances; and from then on, he was spared many life-threatening situations in the future.

Although it was nearing summertime, more than three feet of icepack still blanketed much of the terrain due to the fact that we were deep within the northern mountains. But despite the entire landscape was still entombed by the pervasive remnants of a long winter season, the morning temperatures soared. So, the clear sunny day turned out to be both warm and wonderful. Extensive thawing summarily transformed the nearby brook into an impenetrable torrent of liquid thunder.

Although much of this stream was still encased in a frosted rime, forceful underground floods rumbled down the buried streambed nonetheless. Despite massive amounts of snow and ice continuing to seal off the restless waters, there were countless breaks in that frozen tomb. From quickly expanding breaches, geyser-like fountains detonated skyward. They often burst

upon towards elevations that were normally unattainable; and they even secured lofty footholds by overwhelming the otherwise-inaccessible ledges looming overhead.

As temperatures climbed considerably throughout the day, balmy midmorning breezes metamorphosed into sweltering afternoon blasts. And by three p.m. much of the ice had evaporated, so even more of those frenzied subterranean flows were released above ground. Finally liberated from their stifling winter bondage, the captive waters now transformed into deafening downpours—both irrepressible and inexorable.

Many highly unstable formations still jutted out across the teeming liquefied course and to attempt a crossing anywhere along this section might prove to be calamitous. Alex was wild-eyed with excitement and wide-eyed with disbelief and wonder. Never before had he witnessed such an aquatic spectacle. Although he was familiar with mountain waterfalls and cascades, he had no idea about the intensity or magnitude of seasonal floods at melting time.

Immediately, I could sense his desire to cross one especially inviting ice-bridge that also happened to be a potential disaster-in-the-making. He was still a fair distance ahead of me, so I couldn't restrain him physically. I only had a moment to shout:

Alex, no!

He turned his head towards me for a second. But just as he was about to ignore this command and leap forward, I yelled once more with utmost urgency in my voice:

Alex, no! Alex, stay!

Instantly, he obeyed. But while I was rushing towards him, his attention veered back to the seductively astonishing deluge only a few feet from where he sat. Without warning, he lunged onto that precarious overpass and ostensibly began tiptoeing across it. Again I cried out:

Alex, no!

Then I added anxiously:

Alex, come here!

Acknowledging my adamant plea, he quickly made an about-face. Unfortunately, it was too late. No integrity remained in the formation underfoot, so that entire structure collapsed

beneath him. Alex plummeted into a fiercely ravenous current. Instantaneously he was devoured by it. He disappeared underwater and was whisked away downstream, being hurled hundreds of feet in a matter of seconds.

Several times I saw his shiny black head bobbing in and out of that teeming, tumultuous cauldron while he desperately struggled to keep his snout above froth and swell. I gasped in horror when I realized he was nearing the brink of a formidable cataract. Powerless to save him, I watched helplessly as he slipped over the edge and simply vanished.

At that moment, all I could see was a mental image of poor, dear Alex. I pictured his battered remains washed up on a debris field fashioned by this deadly deluge. My mind clamored in confusion while my body was numbed by shock and anguish. Involuntarily, I charged down the trail at breakneck speed. While paralleling the stream, I screamed out his name again and again. But I finally was overcome with a sense of submission and futility when grim realization proclaimed to me that he was gone forever.

Nonetheless, after reaching an overlook above a seasonally formed yet treacherous whirlpool, I spotted Alex frantically struggling to reach the shore. Rushing down the path to meet him, I continued crying out his name distraughtly. Before I reached the water's edge, he actually had freed himself from the deadly pool's irresistible vortex, dragged himself up onto a large slab of granite, wearily shook his body several times, and then trudged along the path to greet me.

As soon as he was by my side once again, I thoroughly examined him for injuries. Aside from stiffness and exhaustion, he miraculously seemed to be in excellent condition. For the rest of the day, he continued to stay close to me, remaining exceptionally attentive while responding immediately to all that I asked of him.

After this narrow escape, he still disregarded commands when we were at home—but much less frequently. However, while we were hiking, he never ignored any of my pleas again. His fateful *ride* down the rapids seemed to leave a lasting impression upon him, dramatically altering his behavior for the rest of his life. From that day forward, we were able to avoid countless dangers because Alex always disengaged with whatever he was doing any time he heard me call out his name in urgency.

His ability and willingness to respond to the command *no* possibly saved his life on countless occasions. However, over the years *no* came to mean much more to him. Alex learned to express himself both negatively and positively with bodily gestures. *No* was relatively easy

for him to master. He simply imitated me when I shook my head back and forth, from side to side.

On the other hand, nodding his head up and down to indicate *yes* proved to be exceedingly difficult. Indeed, he was eager to cooperate when I assisted him with these motions. His head and neck awkwardly followed along as my hands gently guided them. Yet, he was unable to continue those movements without my help. Soon I realized that not only was our undertaking difficult for him to achieve, but it also appeared to make him physically uncomfortable—though he never actually protested about doing it.

Obviously, I needed to find another gesture to replace this affirmative *nod*. He already associated food as something very positive. Whenever I asked if he wanted his dinner, he immediately would sit before me, extend his tongue, lick his chops, and wag his tail energetically. I decided to see if I could expand his use of *lip licking* to indicate *yes* for other things, too.

As always, I began with plenty of repetition. After calling out his name to get his attention, I would say the word *yes*. Then I imitated his licking motions by extending my tongue outward and passing it over my lips in an exaggerated fashion. He soon began imitating me effortlessly while responding to each time he heard me say *yes*.

It seemed that it might be advantageous to continue our *yes* lessons just before I normally asked him about having dinner, so we could start rehearsing this new use of tongue licking with something already practiced and understood. First, I usually posed the question:

Alex, do you want dinner?

Without hesitation, he always replied eagerly in his conventional manner. After licking his chops with gusto, the routine continued as he followed me through the house to his dinner dish—which was usually kept in a far corner of the kitchen.

Next, I would request of him to pick up the dish. This request always was one with which he complied immediately. By using a front paw, he enthusiastically would flip upward one side of his big, square, plastic bowl. While continuing to hold the *dish* on its side with his paw, he then was able to grab hold of its suspended edge with his mouth. After lifting it up in this fashion, he routinely followed me into the garage where a large bin of dog food was stored.

Once the provision barrel was opened, he would approach me with his dish and politely hand it to me so that I could fill it with his regular portion of kibbles. When this was

accomplished, we continued our ritual by heading back towards the kitchen. He patiently would sit beside me while I mixed his meal with a little warm water and occasionally with a tasty assortment of vegetables and meat bits. After his dinner was prepared, it was placed in its usual spot on the floor; and only after hearing me say *bon appétit* (or my using one of several other similar phrases) would he begin to eat.

As soon as his meal was finished, I normally asked him whether he wanted to go for a walk. In most instances he would dart to the front door. This was the exit that we normally used when setting off on our daily jaunts together. However, in order for him to practice answering yes/no questions regarding these hiking activities as well, I began holding his collar so that he couldn't move away from me instead of allowing him to dash off instantly to the doorway.

Then it was essential to call out his name so that he would look back in my direction. After getting his attention, I asked him again whether he wanted to go for a walk. Immediately thereafter, I licked my lips using an exaggerated motion with my tongue. Instantly, Alex responded with an equally overemphasized lick. I praised him and called him to follow me outside. After a brief jog up the road, we came inside once more to practice further uses of the word *yes*.

Several days later, I began asking him questions that required either a positive or negative response. This would give him the opportunity to practice choosing between tongue licks to signify *yes* or shaking his head to indicate *no*. All of these questions contained words with which he was already very familiar and employed those phrases repeatedly while practicing them with me.

I felt the best way to proceed was to ask questions concerning things to which he reacted enthusiastically and also to things he obviously disliked. His favorite pastimes included walking, hiking,[24] eating dinner, receiving a *cookie*,[25] and having his hair brushed. Some of the things to which he responded negatively were being given a bath, having his teeth brushed,[26] getting his

[24] Alex readily distinguished between going for a walk and going hiking. A walk normally was taken on the road or down a nearby wooded lane, and we usually left the house through the front door. Therefore, he anxiously waited for me on the rug in front of that door. Hiking always meant that I would be filling up my backpack with supplies and usually indicated that we would be going in the car. He often sought out my backpack and waited beside it until I picked it up. Once I filled up the pack and began putting it on my back, he knew we were ready to leave. He then would rush to the garage door, waiting to be let into the car.

[25] The word Alex associated with dog biscuits.

[26] Initially, Alex disliked having his teeth brushed and resisted me while I performed the task; so I continually spoke

nails clipped or cut, and going to the vet's.

I kept sentences short, simple, and with emphasis on the words he recognized. Some of the questions I posed were:

> Do you want to go hiking?
>
> Do you want a bath?
>
> Do you want your hair brushed?
>
> Do you want a cookie?

When he answered affirmatively, we would briefly do what I asked of him. Afterwards, the questioning always continued.

When he answered with a head-shaking *no*, I occasionally would restate the question by saying:

> Are you sure you don't want to go to the vet's?

Or:

> Are you sure you don't want a bath?

Each time I reiterated a question about something he didn't want to do, my insistence always produced a more adamant reply from him. Not unlike the response of a small child, he might wrinkle up his nose and/or his eyes, oftentimes backing away from me with his ears pulled back and tail tucked inward. Then he would shake his head longer and harder, tightening up his entire body. Sometimes, he even let loose with a complaining, low-pitched, guttural groan.

I had to restrain myself from laughing when he reacted in such a manner. If I didn't keep a straight face, he would refuse to take my questions to heart. Whenever he sensed that I was amused by his antics, instantly he would assume a playful stance and begin teasing me. If I wanted the practice to continue being productive, it was imperative to remain serious, speaking to him firmly and steadily at all times.

In the end I often softened my voice and suggested something like:

---

soothingly to him during the procedure and praised him when we were finished. After several years, he actually loved having his teeth cleaned every day. Anytime I asked him if he would like having it done, he excitedly would lick his chops and rush to the kitchen where he routinely waited for me to arrive with toothbrush and toothpaste. Once I was ready for him, he would back up to the front of my legs, sit on my feet in order to prevent his hindquarters from sliding on the floor, and open his mouth so that I could begin.

You really don't want your nails cut?

Without fail he always replied with another vigorously negative headshake. If we simply were working on his ability to answer *yes* and *no* questions, I usually remarked with something appropriately reassuring:

OK, I won't cut your nails now.

Each time I spoke those words, regardless of the tone of voice I employed, his regular reaction was to wag his tail fervently, open his mouth, and happily pant with relief.[27]

However, if he actually could benefit from having a *pedicure* at that time, I would say:

Sorry Alex, but I have to cut your nails now.

After hearing this pronouncement, his demeanor readily transformed—with drooping head, a tightly closed mouth, and both ears pulled back. Infrequently, he might attempt to run into another part of the house to escape the dreaded chore. But ultimately (after being coaxed back to wherever I was standing), he would lead me halfheartedly to our nail-clipping spot in the kitchen, plop down onto the floor into a position suitable for the task, and let out an enormous sigh of resignation and protest.[28]

As years passed by, he no longer resisted when we had an unwelcomed chore to do. If I indicated that we were going to the vet's, he would silently proceed to the car. Nonetheless, it was the only time when something associated with riding in the car wasn't met with his usual excitement and enthusiasm. Also, he never displayed any signs of exhilaration when responding to my occasional announcements that it was time for him to take a bath.

Instead, without remonstration, he would head off to the bathroom door and wait for me to arrive with towels, shampoo, and the like. Having his nails clipped was still as repugnant as ever to him, but he no longer complained. Compliantly, he would assume his position on the kitchen floor, waiting for me to begin his least cherished of pastimes.

---

[27] Initially, my response was, "Alex, no nail-cut". All our verbal interactions began solely with his name and up to three other words. As he readily began to recognize each word in a variety of contexts, then I began adding additional words. If a new word created an incorrect or inconsistent response from him, I discontinued using it for the time being or tried applying it to other commands and interactions. Only one new word or idea was introduced at a time, and others were not added until he consistently responded appropriately to the specific word we were practicing presently; and as always, dozens (if not hundreds) of repetitions were employed during each practice session.

[28] It took only a few weeks for Alex to recognize the difference between the phrases I used to indicate when we actually were going to go ahead with the undesired task and when we were not. His reactions were consistently the same in both cases.

Aside from watching me shake my head to indicate *no* or to lick my lips to express the affirmative, there were many other planned situations in which he was taught to practice observing and coaxed into imitating me immediately thereafter. Many of us still find it hard to believe that animals have the capacity to study and copy. Initially, I too underestimated these capacities in animals. However, when Alex was less than two years old, he surprised me when I began noticing many circumstances in which he would repeatedly attempt to replicate whatever I happened to be doing at the time.

One of several instances took place while we were still living in the small, Vermont farmhouse with a pond nearby. Inside my front door was an entryway. Steep stairs rose from a tiny vestibule to another hall on the second floor. Adjoining the bottom portion of the staircase were narrow compartments where outdoor footwear was kept.

On a particularly warm and sunny morning in late May, I sat down on one of the lower steps of that staircase while putting on my shoes. As I was preparing for my daily rowing excursion around the lake, Alex stood in front of me eagerly waiting for us to go outside together.

As he often did in his younger years, he started pushing my hands impatiently as I was attempting to tie my shoelaces. This obviously hindered (rather than hastened) our departure from the house. Finally, I had to say:

Alex, no!

Then I added:

Alex, sit.

However, instead of sitting across from me on the doormat where he usually sat, he turned around unexpectedly so that his hindquarters were raised directly in front of my face.

With surprising speed, he began backing up awkwardly while keeping his rump elevated high in the air. He strenuously craned his neck so he could watch where he was going. After passing in front of me towards my left, he made a sharp, sudden turn and his butt landed onto the same step where I was sitting. Once he had achieved this goal, he looked into my eyes, sighed a huge sigh, and stretched his lips back towards his ears—creating the most bizarre, human-looking smile imaginable.

This was the first of numerous occasions when Alex backed his rear end onto the steps,

while his front paws still remained on ground level. He was no longer satisfied just sitting on the hallway floor where he always did previously. Because I sat on those stairs, he was now determined to sit there alongside me. While propping himself into such a position, he readily watched intently as I put on my shoes. However, we continued practicing this feat for only a short time thereafter. We soon moved to a new home where we no longer could sit conveniently together on the front steps.

But while at this new house, Alex immediately demonstrated his further abilities to imitate when he even began copying the habits of our two *neighbor horses* who lived just up the road from us. Every evening during our nightly walk, he made a habit of diving off of the road, sneaking past the electric fence into the pasture, and winding up standing side-by-side with both of them. Not only did he just love being with those horses, but he would watch them chew on the tall grass and decided that he wanted to do the same.

So, it soon became almost a daily social event for him to munch on the grass along side of them. He did this despite the fact that he never ate grass at any other time in his life. Imitating his two favorite horse fellows by ripping up and munching on grass pleased him to no end. Without fail, while he was in the midst of performing this regular routine, he would also look down at me on the road and literally cast a look of the deepest satisfaction in my direction. That is to say, sharing a snack of grass with his horse friends always made him share with me the biggest and broadest smile ever.

It is true how some might argue that dogs cannot smile. Many of us who own pets are often accused of harboring the supposedly false notion that our four-legged friends actually imitate our human gestures and characteristics and understand what we say to them as well. In some instances this might actually be a genuinely false notion. However, not in Alex's case. He not only knew how to smile but could do so on command. Aside from the times when he *smiled* on his own like when he showed his contentment by eating grass with those horses, he and I also practiced this particular gesture together. All I had to do was begin by offering an obvious command:

Alex, smile.

Then I would place my fingers at both corners of my mouth and extend my lips back into my cheeks in an exaggerated fashion. After repeating my verbal request another time, I used my hands gently to widen his facial expression into a cartoonish grin. Once he practiced imitating

me by *smiling* several times with my assistance, he was then able to recreate the gesture easily on his own.

Furthermore, we also practiced his learning to laugh in a similar manner. It was easy to have him open his mouth with tongue extended. However, I wanted his *laughter* to be distinctly different from his regular panting. So when we were *laughing* together, I taught him to pull back the corners of his mouth. He was able to achieve this in the same manner as when he smiled. It was very difficult for him to do this with an open mouth and required my assistance for several weeks. Nonetheless, after much practice, he not only was able to do it on his own, but he continued *laughing at will* throughout the rest of his life.

After he mastered these facial expressions, I began teaching him to relate smiling with being happy and to associate laughter with being amused. I often asked him if he were a happy dog. Normally, he would lick his lips affirmatively and then produce one of his comical grins. Often, when I was laughing hysterically about something, he would respond by running into the room full of exuberance. When he saw that I was greatly amused, he immediately would begin to *laugh* with me.

It is true that dogs often pant eagerly if they discover that their human counterparts are excited. Alex certainly panted in this fashion; and he did so with the same canine gestures he employed since puppyhood. But when he actually developed the ability to *laugh*, there was a deliberate pulling back of his lips as he opened his mouth to pant.

Students and visitors occasionally noticed him doing this. His comically weird facial expressions would make anyone who was laughing laugh even harder. Whenever he witnessed our increased hilarity, he would follow suit by pulling back his lips further and continue panting more maniacally than usual.

Occasionally, his mood wasn't filled with his normally carefree enthusiasm; and once in a while he seemed to be actually sullen. During these times he would frequently go off to a far corner of the house and lie silently with his snout tucked between his front paws.

If l called for him when he was behaving like this, he always hesitated before coming to me in an uncharacteristically sluggish manner. When he approached me with his head down and paws dragging on the floor, I would soon ask him:

Alex, are you sad?

Sometimes he would lick his lips as an affirmative, and other times he would quietly mope past

me, apparently trying to avoid any further interactions.

Then I often continued with something more encouraging:

Alex, don't be a sad dog. I want to see your happy face! Where's your beautiful smile?

Usually, just a few statements such as these were enough to transform his sulking facial demeanor into one that was bright and smiling. Nevertheless, there still were moments when added prompting was necessary.

On rare occasions, I even had to reach down and gently pull back his lips with my fingers as I spoke to him affectionately:

Alex, smile!

Sometimes he resisted by turning his head away from me. At those times, I was forced to repeat what I had just done. Once again, I was compelled to say:

Alex, please smile!

Then I would often continue with something like this:

Come on, Alex! Don't be sad. Let's see those handsome lips of yours. Where's my smiling dog? I want to see Happy Alex!

Often he reacted with the slightest trace of a smile. Then I would add:

Oh, that's a tiny smile! I want to see a big, beautiful smile!

After such cajoling, he normally acquiesced by continuing to widen his lips.

Once he became more animated again, we always ended by playing one of his favorite games such as fetch, tug the rope, or dancing together. Whenever we happened to dance, I would sing one of several songs that I made especially for him. Anytime I chose to sing those silly songs, he always *laughed* with delight.[29]

Alex loved when children came to visit us and enjoyed romping with them. He seemed

[29] The only times I allowed Alex to jump onto anyone were when he was asked to dance. Keeping his hind legs on the floor, he would thrust the rest of his body upward so he could rest his front paws on the shoulders of his human dance partner. As he got older I often held his front paws in my hands, because it became too difficult for him to balance himself while extending his body any higher. In his final years, he no longer wanted to jump up at all. Instead, he preferred to circle around those who were dancing, bumping his rump into each of their sides, while he extended his lips into a Cheshire-catlike grin.

to observe them carefully as they tickled each other. I noticed that he tried to poke his nose into the side of their ribs and then would widen his lips into an extended grin.

In contrast, whenever Alex sensed that I was sad, preoccupied, or not feeling very well, he almost always came up to me and rested his head in my lap. He never did this at any other time. While stretching his eyes upward (gazing into mine), he would pull back the corners of his mouth, produce one of his comical *happy faces*, and eagerly wag his tail. If I didn't respond to his initial overtures, he then often bumped his snout into the side of my ribs, making a great effort to cheer me up by *tickling* me.

He continually persisted in bouncing his nose into my side until I smiled or laughed. Every time I responded to his antics, he immediately would stretch his lips back as far as they could go and open his mouth so he might pant wildly with delight. This wasn't something he did randomly once or twice. It was a ritual he performed frequently, especially as he got older.

We practiced smiling and laughing on a regular basis. But I first got the idea to help him with these gestures while watching him attempt to imitate many people who came to see us during the first couple of years that he lived with me. Certainly, after assisting him to widen his grin and encouraging him to *laugh*, Alex's abilities to *smile* and *laugh* seemed to improve considerably. Nonetheless, it was he who began the process by regularly and consistently attempting to emulate others.

One particular habit I didn't wish for him to cultivate further was his keen desire to jump on visitors when they first arrived at the house. Because of his enormous strength and power, he easily could knock over anyone who either was very young or very frail. For over four years I tried numerous techniques to break him of this habit. Unfortunately, none of them were completely successful.

Although many dogs are inclined to jump on people, I knew that it was essential to find a way to break Alex of this habit. After several years, I finally discovered a simple solution that worked immediately—not only with him, but also with several of his canine companions.

This insight first came to me while some people were coming into the house for a weekend gathering. He watched everyone intently while they greeted and hugged one another at the front door. As soon as a couple of them continued into the hallway, he immediately sprung up onto each of them in quick succession. I suspected that Alex also wanted to greet everyone with *hugs*. Additionally, I recently had read that dogs are at eye level when they meet other dogs and jump up to gain the same sort of eye contact with their human friends.

Shortly after that reunion party, I decided to conduct a little experiment. Just before other guests were to come over for a visit, I spoke with them on the phone to explain my idea. After their arrival through the front door, they immediately knelt down on their knees and greeted the dog.

The first person spoke to him without making any physical contact and Alex still began to jump on her. However, he did it with much less force than usual. The second person not only knelt down to greet him, but he also hugged him as he spoke. Alex stood there happily looking into my guest's eyes and nuzzled him affectionately, showing no need to lunge forward.

After my initial test produced these interesting results, I instructed all my friends and students to kneel or squat down to greet him upon entry into the house. Some would only speak to Alex and others would hug him while making their verbal greetings. In every instance when there was no hugging, he still wanted to leap onto them, even though the jumps were never nearly as rough or forceful as when he tackled those who were standing.

But the moment people began including hugs with their hellos, his desire for jumping ceased. Even if some people didn't know to kneel and hug him, or if they were incapable of doing so, Alex was satisfied with the majority of those who did bend down to greet him face-to-face. He never lunged onto anyone ever again except for three unique instances transpiring years apart from each other.

Before making this discovery that virtually ended Alex's *jumping career*, I tried implementing a couple of techniques from various dog training videos and manuals, although neither of them produced a lasting result. Guests were instructed to raise one of their knees to block his upward dives, while speaking sternly to him:

Alex, no, Alex, no jump.

Or, if he had lunged onto someone already, they would say:

Alex, down.

However, a particular adult student continuously refused to discourage Alex's leaping routine. In fact, he systematically called the dog up onto his chest. Whenever this occurred, all previous training to break him of this undesirable habit was thwarted completely. Alex instantly would resume his jumping on everyone. It always took several days of retraining before his conduct returned to being more *polite* again.

Once everyone began bending down to greet Alex at his own eye level, the first time that he reverted to his earlier jumping tendencies came to pass several years later. The adult student—who always beckoned him to jump on his chest—didn't come to the house again for a very long time. Almost six years had passed when he surprised me with an unexpected visit. The moment Alex saw that very tall man, he took a running leap and thrust himself forcefully upon the man's upper torso.

Once my student coaxed him down from his shoulders, he said to me with annoyance and a twinge of sarcasm:

I thought you said Alex doesn't jump on people anymore.

I replied matter-of-factly:

Actually, he hasn't done this since your last visit.

Trying hard not to smile while I added only partially in jest:

It appears that he remembers your preferences.

V.

Additional adventures on four legs...

The next couple of segments will continue addressing how Alex and I practiced together during the course of his lifetime. Some may wonder why such a large portion of this chapter focuses on what may appear to be somewhat of a *canine biography*. After all, what could a detailed account of Alex's training routines (and his daily adventures) possibly have to do with understanding our rightful purpose in the mind garden as human beings?

It is basically because most of us fail to acknowledge most of our regular endeavors as being any sort of practice whatsoever. We essentially take for granted how and what we are

genuinely practicing all the time. Furthermore, we fail to realize that practice occurs every moment of every day—and for everyone! Indeed, a great portion of our hominid overpopulated population is simply unaware of what practice truly means for ourselves as individuals and for our species in its entirety.

That is to say, many of us are inclined to remain oblivious to how we perform endless, habitual, day-to-day tasks as an important slice of what we are regularly rehearsing. Moreover, we consistently ignore (or are incapable of identifying) the myriad of other peoples' attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs that we observe and readily practice by involuntarily imitating them—thereby incorporating their *habits* within our own practiced thoughts and actions. Quite often, these adopted behaviors eventually become an integral part of our own individual persona.

Most people acknowledge only the obvious, culturally traditional varieties of practice. Such forms of ritualistic repetition include activities like daily high school football or soccer drills or when their more artistically inclined schoolmates prepare for the much anticipated (or greatly dreaded) weekly lessons on the piano, violin, trumpet, or on any other musical instruments.

How many of us can readily identify the incremental stages of even a few of our frequent or occasional, deliberate or accidental, systematic or arbitrary practices; comprehend the subsequent transformations resulting from those practices; or explain the sudden and unexpected rises from a lower level of achievement to a considerably higher one, or vice versa?

It oftentimes is beneficial to employ illustrations that seem completely foreign to our own template of experiences. In so doing, we can frequently start to recognize important things in ourselves—to which we otherwise would remain oblivious, or simply ignore and forget. And what would truly appear to be more dissimilar and alien to many of us than to reflect our own daily practices through the parallel routines and interactions employed while training a canine pet—especially since a good number of human folk do not believe that any other species (save our own) can be taught no more than a few simple tricks learned reflexively?

Consequently, the contrasts and similarities provided by establishing appropriate comparisons between ourselves and unfamiliar situations, such as those we might recognize while exploring how Alex actually developed during his sixteen years of relatively consistent training, can assist us in also understanding our own practiced behaviors. Besides, such associations could make them all the more memorable and meaningful. Indeed, examining these types of juxtapositions have the potential to allow us a multitude of realizations about ourselves that we never could discover when simply trying to examine those things in ourselves

directly.

From Alex's earliest years until his final days, he was exposed daily to countless hours of live music. Regularly resonating through each room in our house were the sounds from private lessons, various ensemble practices, chamber music rehearsals, recitals, performance master classes, and musicales.

He spent hours curled up by my feet while I composed new music or practiced the piano. He also was a self-appointed audience to many guest musicians. He oftentimes sat enthralled while gazing into their eyes as they rehearsed. Aside from his apparent love for piano music, he also seemed to be fascinated by our guests who played the violin, cello, and oboe. When anyone began performing on any of these particular instruments, he immediately would gravitate towards whosoever was playing and never budged from their sides until the music had ended.

I am not sure when it first started, but Alex began responding emotionally during live performances. He actually shed tears while music was being played.[30] Later in life, the same reaction occurred while he listened to recorded music as well. This never happened during amateur performances or when students were practicing scales, arpeggios, or other mechanical exercises. Also, at no other times nor for any other reason did he ever *cry*.

Only once in his life did he have an eye infection where there was noticeable wetness beneath his eyes. Nevertheless, this definitely was nothing like his emotional response to music. Whenever he was moved to tears by any performance, his face quickly dried once the music had ended. This reaction wouldn't occur again until the next time he was listening to something that apparently touched him as deeply.

Some music always ended with Alex having a tear-soaked muzzle. He definitely witnessed emotion from me and from many other musicians while we played, but I do not know to what degree our feelings influenced his own. A few individual pieces repeatedly seemed to affect him more deeply than other pieces did—and with amazing regularity.

Moreover, if a musical passage had just been played that was undeniably profound, not only could Alex be seen crying, but his entire body would quiver noticeably. At the end of such

[30] Alex was not the first dog I knew who shed tears while listening to music. My family's collie occasionally cried while I practiced piano as a teenager; and ten years later, an Irish Setter—which I trained for six months—also began to react in the same manner. Someone might ask jokingly if whether the music might really be so bad as to invoke such a negative reaction. But honestly (and in every instance), each dog never fled the scene, howled in complaint, nor became anxious to flee the room. Instead, all of them remained as close to whatever musicians were playing at the time as was logistically possible.

episodes, he often rushed up to all those performing, rewarding everyone with affectionate kisses.

He wept every time I practiced any of the four Chopin Ballades. Several slow movements of various Beethoven piano sonatas also touched him in the same manner. His eyes seldom were dry whenever he heard specific chamber works of Brahms or Dvořák. In addition, particular pieces by Debussy, Rachmaninoff, and Mozart tended to affect him deeply.

Anyone present could see visible droplets seeping down his face whenever he listened to my CD of a certain violinist performing unaccompanied sonatas and partitas of Bach. Yet, when he listened to other recordings of different violinists playing the same compositions, never did he shed even a single tear! At first, I thought it was a coincidence, so I randomly shuffled the performances to which we were listening.

Amazingly, only the one recording moved him to tears, time after time. It is true that most people who heard that particular performance also were affected similarly. Nevertheless, Alex's reaction continued to astound me for years.[31]

Whenever any recorded piece began to play that would move him in this manner, he always rushed to a special place in the living room where he would continue listening. After a while, I became aware that he situated himself in a small space that was equidistant to both stereo speakers. This became such a frequent occurrence, that I came to call the spot his *crying corner*, even though it happened to be in the middle of the room.

Long before he was born, several audiophile friends preached to me about the ideal location for listening to music in any indoor environment. They emphatically declared that the listener should form an equilateral triangle with the two speakers. Does this suggest that Alex could have been a true audiophile as well? When he listened to other music that did not affect him so noticeably, he almost never came to his special spot in the living room. Instead, he would choose one of several random places throughout the rest of the house.

Regularly, I tended to practice scales, arpeggios, and other finger exercises before working on actual pieces. After completing my daily warm-ups, and as soon as I would begin playing the first passage in any composition, I could hear him scurrying towards me, even from the furthest parts of the house. He systematically would rush to the piano, plop down on the floor by my side, look into my eyes while smiling occasionally, rest his head upon two delicately-

[31] I did not become aware of his pronounced and consistent weeping response to that particular violinist's performance of Bach until the latter part of his life, nor did I notice his lack of response towards other recordings of the same music early on.

crossed paws extended before him, and ultimately release a deep sigh of contentment. Usually, this was a daily ritual for him. Once I began working on my performance pieces, Alex rarely left my side. Even if I continued for several hours, he normally wouldn't budge.

After we moved from the farmhouse to our home on the mountain—where Alex spent the greater portion of his life—I no longer had a private room for practicing. Even though this second house was considerably larger than the first, it was logistically impossible to keep the grand piano in any room other than an open-concept living room with no doors and very little privacy.

This oftentimes made it difficult for me to work when other people were staying in the house. If anyone needed to go from a bedroom, the office, or study into the kitchen, garage, or down to the lower level, the only possible route was through the living room. There was no way to achieve this without walking directly in front of where I practiced.

Normally, this wasn't a problem. But the occasional, unexpected appearance of someone standing in the room while I was working with great intensity could be quite jolting. It sometimes even caused in me a sudden lapse of concentration. However, even more unnerving was when those who caught me by surprise continued to apologize over and over again (even for days after the incident occurred) because they felt so guilty about interrupting my work.

To prevent these unfortunate situations from arising continually, I requested that whenever there was need to pass through the living room while I was rehearsing, it would be best to wait until there was a break in the music—unless, of course, it was an emergency. Once this precedent was set, everyone staying in the house felt much more at ease and my practice sessions could remain focused and effective throughout.

Much to everyone's surprise, Alex had evidently been watching these changes. After completing my finger exercises, I often would begin to play his favorite music. Yet, he no longer dashed immediately into the living room to lie by my side. Instead, he rushed only to the end of the hallway. From that vantage point he still wasn't visible to me, although I readily could hear him coming to an abrupt halt just shy of the living room entry.

However, the moment there was a pause in the music, he began demonstrating his desire to enter the room by inching his black snout into full view before me. If I gave no prompt response to this earnest plea (though hilarious to witness), more of that magnificent nose would slowly emerge from around the corner. While the rest of his body still remained hidden, one eye eventually could be seen peeking at me. Soon thereafter, a second eye also would come into view.

Once Alex was capable of fixing his full gaze upon me, an enthusiastic tail would begin thumping robustly against the wall. In the end I would ask him:

Do you want to come in now?

Without hesitation, he always answered by licking his lips in the affirmative, and his tail would reiterate his assertion by emphatically pounding that same wall in double time.

All I had to say in reply was:

Okay.

Not more than a few seconds were needed before he situated himself comfortably next to my piano seat. As ever, he wasted no time before looking up into my eyes, pulling his lips back into an uncanny smile, releasing a sigh of satisfaction, and resting his head upon two well-placed front paws. This was his customary position for listening to music hour after hour.

Just before giving a solo recital at a local college, I scheduled a couple of rehearsals to familiarize myself with the acoustics of the place and with the piano I would be playing. Although Alex had been exposed to live music in various venues, he never experienced performances in an actual hall. I was curious to see how he would react in such an environment, so I invited him to accompany me to the school. Once we were both onstage, he curled up by my feet as I began to play.

Alex usually responded with many tears while I rehearsed these particular compositions. But that afternoon, he exhibited no signs of emotion whatsoever. Granted, listening to music from his vantage wasn't ideal. Between the underside of the piano and the hard, wooden flooring on the stage, any music produced would sound overamplified and distorted there.

I wondered if this disparity could actually affect Alex's feelings. Knowing how much he was often touched emotionally by musical performances, I decided to lead him up into the mezzanine, one of two locations having unquestionably the most beautiful acoustics in this particular theater. I then asked him to stay there while I returned to the piano.

Houselights shone dimly throughout the place, but there remained just enough illumination for me to monitor Alex's behavior while I resumed my work onstage. For almost four hours he sat facing me, virtually not moving a single muscle. He never complained nor did he attempt to beg for my attention. His bright eyes shone wider and wider as time progressed. He seemed to be forever enthralled by whatever he was experiencing.

Once I finished rehearsing and closed up the piano, Alex remained where he sat, expressing no desire even to come forward to greet me. After I left the stage and proceeded towards the mezzanine to fetch him, he continued to fix his gaze totally on my approach. The moment I stood opposite him and said hello, he lunged onto me without warning—whimpering, wining, and bathing me in endless kisses. His muzzle was soaking wet and he continued to shed tears. This clearly was one of the most intense emotional responses he had ever demonstrated in my presence.

The next morning I returned to the hall for one final run-through of my program before the concert that evening. Alex accompanied me as before. The moment we entered the hall, he refused to come onstage. Instead, he bolted up to the same spot in the mezzanine where he sat the day before.

When I began to play, I could see him staring at me across the large and vacant, faintly-lit expanse. He never budged for the entire duration of the rehearsal. Once I was finished and crossed the entire room to greet him, I discovered that his face was wet with tears again. But, rather than jumping on me as he did after the last rehearsal, all he did this time was look up into my eyes, pull back his lips in his extraordinary manner, and simply smiled.

The third and final time he jumped onto someone unexpectedly didn't occur until just before his thirteenth birthday. As I mentioned earlier, Alex learned how to count to ten when he was very young. Day after day we practiced together, beginning with *one* and working our way up to *ten*. Once he mastered this procedure, then I began to mix up the numbers out of sequence.

Initially, I used hand signals to coach him as he barked the appropriate number of times for each count. For example, I might say:

Alex, speak *THREE*.[32]

If he didn't respond, I would continue by saying *woof* three times in succession. While uttering the first *woof*, I would raise one finger. When a second finger went up, I always *woofed* a second time. Finally, the third finger was raised for the third *woof* spoken.

[32] I used the word *speak* rather than the words *say* or *count*. Alex already was very familiar with this expression, because we had been practicing it regularly as the command for him to commence barking. However, he also came to understand the word *count*. I often asked him to begin counting by saying to him one of the following: "Alex, let's count now". "Alex, shall we count to ten now?" When I posed this question to him, he answered with a positive licking of his lips when he appeared eager to count. But when he definitely displayed physical gestures that indicated his lack of desire to count, he always shook his head to indicate a negative response.

Then I would repeat the command. Once he began responding to my requests, I assisted him by raising a finger each time he added a *woof* to his count. Also, it seemed beneficial when I counted aloud while using these specific hand signals.

Occasionally, he became bored with his *counting practice*. At such times, he always scrunched up his face as he backed away from me. Defiantly, he would continue to bark without stopping. To regain his focus, it was necessary for me to say sternly:

Alex, no-speak!

Once he desisted from his protests, I always gave him a good deal of praise. After getting him to settle down, we would begin again. If it seemed as though he were unable to maintain focus any longer, I simply would say:

Okay… Alex, break.

In later years, as his vocabulary increased, I could finish with a number of different statements such as:

Alex, you've had enough…

Alex, we're done…

Alex, no more counting now…

Okay Alex, we're finished…

As soon as I mentioned something along those lines, he immediately would wag his tail and rush over to me, hoping to receive a few vigorous pats. Despite his refusal to practice further, I occasionally might ask him:

Do you want to play now?

He always responded with an emphatic, lip-smacking *yes*. Such an enthusiastic reply immediately would be followed by his running off to find something that I could toss and he could retrieve.

After the first several months of counting, he actually was able to *recite* each of his ten practiced numbers without any cues or coaching from me. However, if there was a lapse in our daily training, his barked responses often became inaccurate. Whenever this happened, the pace of his barking was likely to accelerate. He also would teeter from the left side of his body

to the right as though his inability to produce the correct answers frustrated him.

The moment this change of behavior became obvious to me, I always reinitiated the use of hand signals to assist him. Once he was able to count accurately again, his responses tended to slow down and his body relaxed noticeably.

Despite that Alex's enthusiasm for counting diminished considerably over the years, almost every person who knew him never tired of watching him perform this unique feat. He already resisted me every time he was asked to practice counting, so his performances for others eventually became the only times when we worked on this routine together.

Then he began to shake his head *no*, even when he was performing for his favorite people. If I continued insisting that he count, he would begin barking uncontrollably—always stretching his lips back into one of his occasional, impish smirks. Even when I retorted sharply with, "Alex, no-speak!", he still refused to desist.

At these junctures, there was nothing I could do that might persuade him to continue counting, so I would add soothingly:

> Okay Alex, no-count.

Each time I spoke those words, his barking stopped in a flash. He then would dash over to me, panting heavily with no further *grinning*, and begin showering me with dog kisses.[33]

However, there came a point when he didn't want to count under any circumstance. I was puzzled by this change of heart, as he used to rehearse the numbers with great enthusiasm. So, consequently, I began to pose questions to myself such as:

> Does he resent having to *perform* for people? (There certainly are moments when he appears to be annoyed.)
>
> Have we over-practiced the routine so he has actually tired of it? [All the other tasks he carries out are specific, concrete goals.]

[33] When Alex was very young he learned not to lick people. I used the command, "Alex, no-lick". Later on, he often observed friends kiss each other as they hugged. So there were times when he began to stick out his tongue to *kiss* people without quite actually making contact with their faces or hands, because he knew that he was not supposed to lick them. After teaching him the word *kiss*, he daintily would lap dog kisses onto anyone who said, "Alex, give me a kiss". Nevertheless, he practically never licked anyone unless he had been invited to do so. Almost never was this rule broken by him except on rare occasions when he was overwhelmed with emotion. At such times, he often shivered conspicuously while kissing. He only did this in situations that were similar to those in which a person might be so moved, as to display deep, emotional outpourings of relief, gratitude, or affection.

Could he actually be thinking or feeling that there are no tangible results when he counts?

Has this routine become so much of a chore that he now finds it totally meaningless?

I know there are those who dismiss such queries as being absurd, insisting that animals are incapable of having these notions. Nevertheless, if Alex's waning desire actually were caused by his inability to find any purpose for counting, or because he tired of performing this task in front of other people, maybe a different approach would improve his *attitude* towards it.

Up until this time, the way we practiced together perhaps had been overly abstract. I wondered if his interest in counting could be reignited by my associating the numbers with real objects that obviously were important to him. So I gathered ten of his dog biscuits, ten tennis balls, and several of his favorite toys. But before bringing him into the kitchen, I placed all of these items in an inconspicuous corner on the kitchen counter. Once everything was ready, I invited him in and he promptly sat down.

Side by side, I positioned three dog biscuits near the edge of the counter. Immediately, he focused on these *cookies* in front of him. Then I asked:

Alex, how many cookies?

After a brief pause, I continued.

There are three cookies.

At this point, I began to *woof* three times while lifting up three fingers, one after the other. Simultaneously, with my other hand, I began pointing to each biscuit in succession. Once again I inquired of him:

Alex, how many cookies?

His attention seemed to peak at that moment. His eyes widened and his ears perked up. In a flash, he barked three times.

Then I grouped four more dog biscuits further down the counter and pointed to this new bunch. Quickly, I added:

Alex, how many cookies?

As soon as I pointed to them, he enthusiastically responded:

Woof, woof, woof, woof!

After repeating these exercises a few times, I praised him enthusiastically after each one. Then, I took those four biscuits and slid them a little closer to the other three—though still not combining them all together yet.

Subsequently, I counted aloud, raised one finger at a time while reciting each consecutive *woof*, and said:

> Three cookies (woof, woof, woof) and four cookies (woof, woof, woof, woof) are seven cookies.

Immediately thereafter, I pushed all the biscuits into a single group—pointing to each one in succession while *woofing* seven times.

Alex was transfixed as he watched me and began to shiver uncontrollably. I quickly placed the dog biscuits back into their original groupings and began questioning him again. He barked three times for the cluster of three cookies and four times for the cluster of four. Once I grouped all seven biscuits together again, he responded by barking seven times. Then, he suddenly thrust himself onto my body, heaved his front paws up on my chest, bathed my face with endless, wet kisses, and began to whimper uncontrollably. If dogs experience *eureka* moments, this most definitely had to be one of them.

Alex almost never cried or whined during all the years we lived together. Except for this seeming *mathematical breakthrough* (and the incident at the college recital hall), all his other whines and whimpers were caused by sudden fright, physical pain, or being left alone and isolated. He never cried out for any other reason. Yet, in both of these unique cases, it was obvious that something extraordinary had just transpired to cause such an emotional response.

After rewarding him with much praise and a well-deserved *cookie*, he was exceptionally eager to continue counting. He identified the exact number of biscuits in every grouping I put before him. I tested him with large and small collections of tennis balls and a wide variety of his assorted toys.

He correctly added the number of things in one group with those in another.[34] He also

[34] A few days later, he began performing simple addition without props, hand signals, or other cues from me. Eventually, I attempted to teach him to subtract as well. He began practicing this type of calculation while I supported his efforts with more dog biscuits, hand signals, and other visual aids. However, he rarely subtracted on his own. Perhaps when his revered *cookies* were removed from sight, his attention couldn't be captivated nearly as much as when those prize treats were added to the equation!

distinguished biscuits from balls and balls from other toys. If I quizzed him on how many balls there were in a mix of biscuits, balls, and toys, he responded by counting only the correct number of balls that randomly were placed among other numerous items.

In all the years we worked together, never before had he been so eager, excited, or focused. It definitely was the most extensive practice session of his long and remarkable counting career. He willingly continued non-stop, *speaking* number after number for nearly three hours.

From that day forward he almost always counted with enthusiasm. Never again did he protest or refuse to practice. Some might say his numbers were recited even joyfully. Until the last final months of his life, he willingly *woofed* "three" or "six" or "eight" or "four-plus-five" accompanied by his irreplaceable smiles, outbreaks of uncanny laughter, and the pounding thumps from a perpetually wagging tail.[35]

I occasionally have heard and read that dogs are incapable of recognizing the images in photographs, paintings, or on television screens because we (as human beings) are the only known species wired to focus visually on two-dimensional imagery. Another theory mentions canines as simply being indifferent towards any flattened representations of physical objects. This is because such cardboard semblances produce no scents to mount even the slightest curiosity for them.

However, I believe there is a third possibility. People tend to practice looking at these types of things from the time we're very young, while other species basically have no experience teaching or learning to *see* consistently in this manner. It is well to remember that our kind begins *exercising* such two-dimensional observation from infancy onward.

How many of us read bedtime stories to our toddlers while regularly pointing out the included illustrations and describing them simultaneously? Babies and very young children do not seem to focus while being introduced to two-dimensional representations initially; and consequently, they show no interest. It is only through regular, repetitive exposure that our kids begin to direct their attention toward television images and express interest in book

---

[35] During the final year of his life, a throat condition (which he already had for several years prior) slowly exacerbated until his *speaking voice* became continually raspy and significantly weaker. After this became quite serious, it was apparent that barking was both difficult and uncomfortable for him to manage, so we discontinued counting almost entirely after that.

Yet, there were still two occasions when people begged to see him add and subtract once more. So, I asked Alex if he wanted to count for them, and he enthusiastically complied. But other than those final, rare moments, his counting days were truly at an end.

illustrations.

During Alex's younger years, I occasionally did invite him over to the TV or put a picture of a dog in front of him while describing to him what it he was looking at. I might even bark once or twice for emphasis. Nevertheless, as to be expected of dogs, he predictably expressed a momentary inquisitiveness, sniffed the objects briefly, and then hurriedly trotted off to find something more appealing to explore.

However, during the last several years of his life, I began questioning my earlier assumptions about his inability to focus on printed images, watch television, and other similar forms of observing the two-dimensional. After all, I had already developed a certain, understandable misconception about the viewing limitations of all animals—including those of my own dog—from countless untested (or inadequately tested) notions that have been handed down to each of us, generation after generation.

How could it be otherwise? All through life most of us have been told that all animals are inferior to humans. They cannot communicate as effectively as we do; they are not as intelligent as we are; they do not have the ability to feel; and finally, they are incapable of obtaining any form of true awareness or consciousness. Although we simultaneously might acknowledge the superior hearing, sight, smelling, and certain instinctive abilities of many other animals, we tend to treat these facts rather dismissively while continuing to pontificate on how we are indisputably superior as a species.

Despite that many of these fallacies were also reinforced and maintained by a prevailing consensus within past generations of the scientific community, current findings have begun to discredit those flawed assumptions. Through improved research methods and developing greatly improved designs in experimentation models, more recently-trained animal behaviorists have started to realize the unique forms of extraordinary intelligence and a potential for genuine consciousness in countless species other than our own.

My personal feelings on this subject started to shift after I discovered ways of encouraging Alex to look at himself in a mirror. Although some pets are known for gazing at their own reflection for hours, I always wondered whether or not this type of behavior could have manifested instantly or if each animal's appreciation for prolonged *mirror gazing* was something that had to be practiced and learned over time. I also began to speculate if a mirror could be used as a practice mechanism for improving canine focus on (and comprehension of) any two-dimensional imagery such as TV images, illustrations in books, or even paintings

hanging on the wall.

When I first introduced Alex to a full-length standing mirror in my office closet, our reflected movements seemed to alarm him momentarily. But, with a little coaxing from me, he nervously approached it, sniffed at the reflection of his own nose with an unusual degree of hesitation, and then suddenly fled from the room. This response suggested to me that he most definitely could see this type of two-dimensional image. After our first several *visits* to the mirror, although it no longer startled him, he still wasn't interested in lingering there. As time went on, he simply developed an attitude of total indifference.

But, during the latter half of his life, I began accompanying him to the mirror once again. However, now I would hold onto his harness so he couldn't escape from our new training sessions. I always began by standing next to him while pointing to his reflection in the mirror.

After saying in a soft and friendly voice, "Hi, Alex" at the mirror, I then would stroke his head while pointing to our reflected images. He could watch me stroke his reflection as he simultaneously was experiencing the sensation of being patted—certainly, a feeling with which he already had become very familiar.

I would keep saying recognizable words and gestures to his reflection, point at the reflection, and then turn to him and repeat the same procedure. Switching back and forth, he could observe concurrently the attention I was giving to him directly and the identical things I was addressing to his reflection. With this type of practice, he soon seemed to realize the mirror to be a representation of himself and not just another animal that was neither unapproachable nor one that didn't seem to emit any scent.

During a period of several weeks, he actually showed an ever-increasing interest as he looked into the mirror. He also appeared to be much more comfortable and at ease with this activity. When I continued patting him on the head while having him *observe* our interaction in the mirror, he suddenly began to turn and face me while stretching back his lips into one of his self-imposed smiles.

Further breakthroughs continued to occur over the next few months until I started to see him come to the mirror on his own, gazing at his own refection without any encouragement on my behalf. Sometimes he would even smile, yawn, lie down, shift back and forth between sitting and standing positions, or employ other physical gestures while intently watching his mirror image go through the same motions.

After realizing that he now wasn't only comfortable with gazing at his own reflection but

also appeared to be genuinely enjoying himself in the process, I then switched our practice to looking at large printed illustrations of dogs. I used canine images because they might possibly pique his interest more than any other images worthy of being introduced to him.

The first task was to test him at various points away from the pictures. This was done to ascertain whether or not a particular distance had to be discovered for him to focus optimally and to stimulate his curiosity as well. Also, such adjustments seemed to affect his comprehension dramatically while maintaining an overall interest and willingness to continue our practice without protest or resistance. I also would bark and point to the pictures as I repeated the word *dog* or *doggie*, two words obviously recognizable to him already.

One of the most difficult challenges in this exercise was that whenever I showed him these pictures, his immediate reflex was to lunge forward and sniff at the images. But, in doing so, he also seemed to lose his visual focus and all interest immediately thereafter. In time, I found that if I held him in place, brought the picture closer so he could do his preliminary snuffling, and then quickly resume a distance where he appeared to be concentrating visually on the image again, then he was content to continue looking at it for several minutes at a time.

As soon as he achieved a consistent level of attentiveness, I then noticed another interesting change. Once I pointed out to him all of the artwork displayed around the house (describing each one with simple language and using a majority of words already familiar to him), he suddenly started gazing up into many of those paintings and prints for extended periods on his own. This was something that he had never been inclined to do before then.

Throughout his lifetime, I would periodically call him over to the television screen if there happened to be a show with barking dogs or with other audible sounds to which he already had shown an interest in the past. For many years, I brought him very close to the screen so he could sniff, but when he could pick up no identifiable scents, he always rushed away as quickly as possible.

However, because of my later discovery concerning his inability to focus visually when bringing him extremely close to any object, I decided to try introducing him to images on the television from several distances that were each further and further away from the screen. Initially, he still insisted on going up to the television for his preliminary sniffing routine. But after this had been accomplished, I then would coax him to back away from the TV while continuing to observe him, to see if his reactions might change. At the same time, I continued to mimic the sounds coming from the currently-running program to further stimulate any

interest that he might initially have acquired momentarily.

After exposing him to numerous practice sessions, regularly repeating this process, I soon began to notice him focusing on the images for even up to a minute at a time. Nevertheless, his curiosity still tended to disappear quite rapidly.

But a dramatic shift ensued as soon as I tried this experiment in total darkness, so the only source of light being emitted was coming from the television itself. At night, there were no heavy external reflections being cast onto the screen. So, the actual images (projected by the TV) no longer were distorted or hidden by an increase of interference from daylight or any lamplight in the room.

Once this simple change had been made—and without the least bit of prompting on my behalf—he quickly sat down and followed the activity taking place on the screen while displaying his own subtle head and eye movements accordingly. This was the first time when the television produced any such reaction from him. After that, he actually would come and sit several feet from the screen without any insistence from me and oftentimes continue watching the entire film.

There were several occasions when Alex would view a comedy alongside several of my friends. It was very amusing for us to see him burst out *laughing* at appropriate moments, sometimes even before his human counterparts reacted in like manner! Yet, how much of this onscreen activity was he truly comprehending, or were some (or all) of his reactions simply a type of random imitation? Unfortunately, this question remains unanswered to this day. But nevertheless, he continued to be an avid movie fan for the rest of his life, regardless of how much or how little he really could understand about what he was watching.[36]

Once he voluntarily began sitting down to view movies of his own accord, I soon discovered that his favorite place for engaging in this pastime was in our minivan, during extended car trips at night. Prior to this movie-watching trend of his, he normally would enter the van enthusiastically through one of the side doors, briefly sniff about on a large, soft quilt (one which I would lay out on the floor for him), plop down noisily, and promptly go to sleep

[36] After I moved out of my parents' house and began going to college, I never had a television for many years. Not until I had an electronic music and recording studio did I finally obtain a TV once again. However, I used several television screens mostly to monitor movie soundtracks, dialogue, and sound effects. I often did this while working on other things in various parts of the house. One of my goals at the time was to compose film scores. So, I built up a sizeable VHS and DVD collection to expedite my soundtrack study by listening to a wide variety of soundtracks over and over again.

Although I did occasionally watch movies for pleasure, my main interest was to analyze the music, the styles employed, the juxtapositions of music to dialogue, and also how it coincided with the countless sound effects employed. Consequently, my televisions were hooked up solely to a video player and never subscribed to a cable service. That was because most TV shows and news programs were of no interest to me.

for much of the ride. This is something he did systematically, even when I would turn on the DVD player to listen to film dialogues and their accompanying music soundtracks while I was driving.

However, after he developed a taste for viewing videos, no more was he content just to lie down and fall asleep.[37] Instead, he started sitting against the front edge of the rear seat. This he did in order to support his hind quarters and prevent them from sliding backwards while remaining in an upright position.

He then would wait patiently for a video to begin. If I happened to forget to load the DVD player, several gentle nudges from his long, lovely nose were soon to be felt bumping against my shoulder. He always did this to get my attention and normally caused me to glance into the rearview mirror at him.

Immediately, I could see Alex looking back at my reflection. Gazing directly into my eyes through the mirror, he inevitably would be smiling broadly with one of his affable smiles. This he would do while whipping his tail back and forth in a frantic whirl of anticipation. After all, these jovial antics were friendly reminders for me to start playing a video.

One of my favorite memories from his movie-watching days was when we were driving up to Acadia National Park in northeastern Maine. I was planning to take him hiking up several mountains that overlooked the Atlantic Ocean. After entering the Maine Turnpike in the southern part of the state, we soon approached a toll booth shortly after midnight. Once I stopped the car, opened my window, and handed over my money to the lady inside the booth, instead of greeting me in the customary fashion, she unexpectedly shrieked with delight and pointed her finger wildly at Alex and exclaimed:

Oh, my goodness! I can't believe it. Your dog is actually watching a movie!

I chuckled and replied to her cheerily:

Yeah, he really is watching it, isn't he? Actually, he just loves movies!

Normally, after his witnessing someone making such a fuss over him, he typically would dash to the window and extend his hellos enthusiastically. But even after the toll lady and I

[37] It must be mentioned here that Alex could never watch movies in the van during daylight hours. The excessive light made it impossible for him to see any images onscreen. During such times, he would resort to his familiar habit of lying down and falling asleep for much of the drive.

repeatedly called out his name, he continued to ignore both of us while persisting in his fixation upon the video screen. It was only then that I suddenly wondered if he had truly become a bona fide (and totally indefensible) couch potato!

Throughout most of his life, Alex was a robust and incredibly powerful dog. He preferred to bolt or *zoom* rather than to walk. Even running briskly had less attraction to him than thundering forward like an express train. Whenever he leapt into the air it was more like an inverted flash of lightning.

An adult student-couple of mine had a greyhound and a saluki. Both breeds were renowned for their enormous speed and popularity in professional dog racing. When I offhandedly commented on how powerful and fast Alex was, they replied by saying that he certainly couldn't keep pace with either of their dogs.

However, the first time they dropped by and brought their impressive thoroughbreds over to visit with Alex, all of us were greatly surprised and amused by what transpired next. Those two beautiful canines bounded out of the car and instantly began carousing with my large-size Lab. Regardless, they towered over him, and he instantly was elated to have these giant new buddies. But after playing with him for several minutes, his new companions suddenly noticed the large meadow behind the house and took off to dash through its high grasses.

They both were magnificent to watch as they soared elegantly through the reeds with an effortless motion that seemed almost capable of catching the wind. It took Alex only a few moments to realize they had just flown off into the field. But as soon as he became aware of this, he exploded after them like a bullet. The two newcomers continued their rapturous ride across the back meadow. But, as we continued to watch them while they gracefully galloped towards the far edge of the field, we also could see an unexpected, rumbling whirlwind of flying dust and hay gaining upon them every second.

Although he wasn't tall enough for us actually to see him in his mad dash to keep up with his pals, it nevertheless was obvious who was gaining on these marvelous racing breeds. Within seconds, Alex passed them by like a cyclonic thunderbolt and continued shooting further ahead of them. My two students were gleefully astonished to see their agile dogs trailing behind Alex's flight of furious frenzy.

Even as a puppy he could often prove to be seen as being more than just overly rambunctious. Compounded by his great strength and speed, his excessively playful disposition

had the potential of being hazardous to others. Although he never was mean or aggressive, his dynamic disposition—in conjunction with sizable teeth, jaws, and toenails—could transform him from that affectionate, sociable creature he often was into a deadly weapon of mass destruction!

In order for him not to injure unintentionally those with whom he interacted, it was crucial that his overexuberant behavior be mollified. Whenever he happened to be too excited, simply to reprimand him would mean constant scolding. That in itself could produce undesirable results so a more effective solution needed to be found.

Alex already had extensive practice differentiating between opposites. Yes and no, good and bad, come and go, up and down are only just a few examples. I realized that the simplest way to resolve this frustrating situation was by systematically providing him with gentler alternatives to his frequent, unmanageable outbursts.

Every time he started to act up, I immediately would give his backside a light shove with my hand, and say in a firm, disapproving tone:

Alex, no-rough!

Without pause I then would soften my voice and add:

Alex, gentle.

At that point, I always began stroking his head very softly and affectionately, while crooning the word *gentle* a few times.

At first, he reacted by pausing momentarily before resuming his boisterous horseplay. I was required to repeat continuously the entire process until he settled down. The instant his mood mellowed, I poured quiet, tender praises upon him. Within several days, he readily could distinguish between being rough and gentle and seemed visibly delighted to tone down his behavior whenever I asked him to do so. It didn't take long before he regularly could greet everyone calmly and politely.

Alex rarely had opportunities to interact with cats, but he was overjoyed whenever we visited friends who had feline companions living with them. The moment any cats surfaced nearby, his initial instinct was to dive at the unsuspecting creatures. Although his enthusiastic pounces were intended as friendly invitations to carouse, overtures such as these regularly had an opposite effect on those animals that were only a fraction of his size. He always was baffled and disappointed when they inevitably would hiss at him while franticly making a hasty exit.

After all, to terrorize them was never his intention. His only desire was to play with these new, potential pals.

However, once he learned how to greet cats more calmly, they all became instant friends. Alex and I customarily practiced together to transform his rough behavior into genuine gentleness whenever we could drop in on his miniature, leonine buddies.

Eventually, he understood that his encounters with cats were most successful if he were able to remain relaxed and unhurried while approaching them. As soon as he stood by their side, quietly he would lie down and roll onto his back. This totally submissive position seemed to be very inviting to all of his feline fellows. They wasted no time curling up against his chest, oftentimes snuggling with him for hours. It was always obvious how much Alex loved these encounters, because his tail would begin banging on the floor whenever his *kitty* friends were beside him.

Once any of them gave him a signal to play, he somehow recognized the importance to mollify his *joie de vivre* with those who were smaller or less vigorous than he was. He also seemed to comprehend that a milder manner was needed to interact with young children and the elderly.

Yet, if dogs came to play, his immediate response was to open up the throttle again and blast his way into, around, or over those canine comrades of his—knowing that an increase of energy was appropriate, acceptable, and even desired. It often stirred me deeply to witness how he actually could distinguish between when it was suitable for him to be his usual, lively self and when it was crucial that he retain a more composed disposition.

Most dog owners have probably noticed the very protective, aggressive, and even vicious behavior in their pets while they chomp on bones, eat their food, or even chew on their toys. Alex definitely encountered those reactions firsthand from countless other dogs (including his own parents and siblings), whenever he approached them while they were engaged in these activities.

However, when he was very young, I wanted to expose him to another possible behavior so that he wouldn't adopt and continue practicing these typically antagonistic canine habits.[38]

[38] The following may seem like a simple training technique that anyone can use with any dog. However, there are numerous, underlying factors that could yield unpredictable results. It never should be attempted by children or anyone who doesn't have adequate experience handling animals. Those who do attempt this (or any other approach mentioned herein) must accept full responsibility for what transpires during and after such training. Countless habits and underlying practices make up the behavior of each dog, including all interactions with their human and canine companions. Therefore, different approaches may be more effective and even necessary to achieve effective results with other animals.

After he understood the command to be *gentle*, I reminded him by saying this word—even as I pretended to munch on any of his dog biscuits. Often, I would make sounds of contentment while telling him how delicious those *cookies* were. If he began to lunge at me during this practice, I would remind him again to be *gentle*.

Once I could depend on him to remain calm throughout the entire process, I then began approaching him during his dinner. Frequently reminding him of that important word *gentle*, I would come to his dish on my hands and knees and begin to lick my lips while muttering sounds of relish and satisfaction. Carefully moving my head directly above the dog dish within inches of his mouth, I began to mimic his eating by smacking my lips earnestly.

This maneuver was accomplished in gradual stages, over a period of almost two weeks. By the time I began placing my head next to his, I was overjoyed with how he responded to my advances. The moment I neared his food, he simply wagged his tail and inched his entire body sideways (away from where I was situated) to give me more room at the dish. After that, whenever other dogs came into the house while he was eating, he consistently responded the same way each time.

Although this seemed to be working while he was eating regular dog food, most dogs are much more protective when they are crunching on meaty animal bones. One evening I noticed that he was on the front lawn devouring a steak bone that a neighbor must have given him. Suddenly, a local female puppy came bouncing merrily across the yard. I had no time to open the door and call out to Alex, reminding him to be gentle.

The puppy soon spotted Alex munching away and tentatively approached. At that instant, he had both ends of the bone secured with each of his front paws while continuing to gnaw on its center. Once he noticed his little friend nearby, he released the tasty prize from his clutches, edged sideways to expose more of his bone for the pup, and resumed munching on only the far end. While doing this, he began wagging his tail as a welcoming invitation.

So, the little *girl* dog immediately lay down next to him and began chewing on the opposite end. Together, they amicably remained in that position for much of the entire evening. Of all the dogs I have encountered in my life, Alex is the only one who behaved consistently in such a manner.

However, before he had *mastered* this *gentle* attitude, he tended to get agitated if anyone came too close to his food. Although he never growled or snapped like many dogs, he certainly could have acquired that behavior easily if he hadn't been exposed to and practiced a more

polite alternative.

VI.

Chasing chipmunks, lessons in math, and communing with angels...

As we proceed onward through these stories about Alex's daily training routines and his life in general, it is easy to see how much of his practice was linked to activities that we consider to be *play*. We most likely perceive the lives of all dogs and other house pets as normally being greatly occupied with leisure and spontaneous forms of amusement. However, when we consider what would be acceptable amounts of unpremeditated horseplay among members of our own species—once adulthood has been reached—the amount of such recreation allowed to be part of our daily routine is greatly reduced or eliminated altogether.

That being said, it is important to state here how essential play is for adults as well as for our children. During the past few decades, studies in human behavior have discovered that playing for anyone heightens the imagination, enhances creativity, aids in problem-solving activities, and is crucial for emotional well-being.

Throughout Alex's life, two of his favorite pastimes were playing with toys that squeaked and breakneck racing. Needless to say, he adored chipmunks because not only did they move extremely fast, but they squeaked incessantly while doing so. I think he assumed that they were his own, personal, high-speed squeaky-toys.

Because Alex was an exceptionally fast fellow, it didn't take long before he began catching chipmunks. Unfortunately, he tended to crush them, either while he initially pounced on them or when he grabbed onto their pint-sized bodies with his powerful jaws. I do not think his intention was to hunt or hurt these little critters, but rather he seemed intent on catching them so he could present his trophies to me.

Once I instructed him to be gentle with his *chippies*,[39] Alex's attitude transformed instantly and the technique he used to capture them also changed. From then on, he always held his mobile squeaky pals tenderly in his mouth. Never again did he clamp down on them with his teeth, nor did he continue to clobber them with his paws before scooping them up into his jaws. As soon as he brought them to show me, I would praise him, tell him what beautiful *chippies* they were, and ask him to let them go gently. Without fail, he complied eagerly.

After the unsuspecting, tiny captives recovered from the shock of being in Alex's hot and slimy mouth for several minutes, they would scurry into the brush or up a tree close at hand. Never did he try to run after them. Instead, he regularly stood by my side, wagging his tail emphatically, while together we watched them rush off. Finally, he would look up into my eyes, deliberately pull back his lips, and give me one of his uncanny grins—a smile that could only be interpreted as Alex's inimitable expression of complete satisfaction.

Although he remained an exceptionally fast dog for most of his life, by the time he was nine years old, his speed no longer could rival the velocity of those chipmunks he loved to chase and grab. Despite the fact that he discovered how to pick them up lovingly, using great care never to injure the little creatures, I was gratified that they no longer were in danger of being the mere objects of a retriever's instincts. Also, no longer would they be frightened senseless while remaining captives in a dark, dank cavern of formidable maws, teeth, and tongue.

Alex's ability to be gentle proved an invaluable asset many times during his nearly sixteen years of living. In his old age, there was a time when his hind quarters began to weaken substantially. Whenever he would go up or down the stairs, he used the enormous thrusting power of his back legs to bolt his entire body upward or downward in one blurred dash. But once that strength began to fail, his back legs no longer could keep up with the normal pace of his front legs. This caused him to stumble and collapse midway on the stairway, and he would fall to the bottom.

I thought he might never use the stairs again, so I moved his *bed* up to the main floor of the house.[40] Because of my doing this for him, he no longer needed to gallop down to the

[39] The is the word Alex associated with chipmunks.

[40] With the aid of *kennel-training* techniques, Alex was housebroken easily and quickly. By integrating several methods used by trainers, I succeeded in getting him to do his *business* exclusively out-of-doors within three days. At night, when I couldn't monitor his activities, he slept in a kennel with its gate closed and secured. Once he no longer was prone to having early-morning *accidents*, I immediately transformed the crate into his *bedroom*. Its door remained open and a well-fitted mattress replaced the cold, metal pan that originally was its base. This metal cage soon became his sanctuary.

lower level. Nonetheless, Alex occasionally indicated that he still desired to go downstairs. So, there were numerous times when I had to cart him bodily up and down; but it wasn't sensible to regularly hoist and carry eighty pounds of muscular dog along this steep, turning, narrow staircase.

It didn't take long to realize that there might be a viable substitute to his normally wild and thunderous approach to traversing the stairs. He certainly had learned to be gentle in many situations. I wondered if a quieter and more relaxed approach to navigating the stairway might enable him to resume moving from floor to floor on his own.

Initially, I carried him to the lower floor and set him down near the base of the stairs. When I asked him to approach the bottom steps with me, he drew back and began to quiver. After soothing him, I convinced him to follow. As soon as he faced them, he unexpectedly bolted forward and lunged up a couple of steps before I could prevent him from doing so. However, because his hind legs no longer were able to keep up with his front legs, he collapsed onto his chest.

I quickly came to his side and comforted him before bringing him back down to the bottom. In that instant, I knew what must be said so that he might safely and confidently traverse the stairs once more. It was essential that all the vocabulary I used, while teaching him to perform this undertaking, comprised of words he already knew.

Having him seated and facing the bottom of the staircase once more, I said:

Gentle up, gentle down.

After speaking these words, I slowly lifted one of my legs up high and then set that foot softly on the first step. Then I repeated the task with my other leg. Continuing to repeat the process over and over again, I also continued to quietly reemphasize the same words. During the entire process he watched all of my movements attentively.

After bringing him back to the bottom step, I held his harness so that he couldn't lunge

---

Whenever he was tired, felt ill, or simply wanted to be alone, he always retreated to his bedroom. Because he had his own, comfortable place where he now could rest, he never had an inclination to lie on furniture. At whatsoever time I decided to retire at night, I regularly asked him if he would like to go to bed. His normal response was a lip-licking yes, unless he needed to go outside to tend to his *bathroom duties* first. If that were the case, he simply would turn his head towards the direction of the front door.

Then, using his snout, a quick nudge to my hand was a definitive indication of what he was attempting to communicate. I replied by asking if he needed to go outside to do his *business*. His answer always included an emphatic smacking of his chops as he rushed excitedly to the outer door. After tending to his *duties*, he definitely was ready for sleep. First, he would escort me to my bedroom, stopping at the doorway while I gave him his well-anticipated *goodnight pat*. As soon as I spoke the words, *Okay Alex, nighty-night*, he immediately would frolic downstairs to his bed. During this final pilgrimage of the day, an agreeable tail always waved eagerly behind him.

upward again. Then I said softly to him:

Alex, one paw up. Gentle. Paw down, gentle. Other paw up, gentle. Other paw down. Gentle.

He instantly responded in an appropriate manner. But as soon as I mentioned the back paws, his reflexive response was to thrust forward automatically.

The moment he began doing this, holding on to him so that he couldn't move ahead, I firmly commanded:

Alex, NO!

Without hesitation I added in a more mellow tone:

Alex, gentle back-paw up.

While saying this, I slowly raised one of my legs in an exaggerated fashion.

Still holding him by the harness strap, he began to proceed step-by-step up the stairs. Occasionally, he wanted to bolt in one direction or the other. At those moments, I had to speak reassuringly:

Alex, no. Alex, stay. Very good!

After several minutes, we finally reached the top. I poured praises upon him, while I released his body from my grasp. He wagged his tail vigorously and panted with relief.

I remained seated on the floor, continuing to speak with him in a calming fashion. Once he was noticeably more relaxed, I gradually stood up and took hold of his harness again. I asked him to heel and he followed me to the edge of the stairs in the main hallway.

Immediately, I began to slowly raise one foot after another, using the same words I spoke earlier. After he quivered for a second, I praised him once more and said:

Alex, let's go downstairs. Gentle paws.

Although he hesitated for a moment, he then followed me down the entire stairway, slowly lifting all four of his paws in perfect sequence.

During the next several weeks we practiced this routine daily. Again and again, we slowly went up and down countless steps, for over an hour each day. After he demonstrated that he could maneuver several approaches without having the urge to charge ahead, I let go of his

harness and permitted him to walk alongside me on his own.

At last, our training together seemed to be stable enough for him to proceed into the final stage of practice. After walking away from the stairway altogether, I said to him confidently:

Alex, go downstairs. BE GENTLE.

Quietly and carefully, he descended all the way to the lower level without a single falter. When he accomplished his goal successfully, I calmly gave him brief praise. Immediately thereafter, I asked him to come upstairs. Once more, I emphasized the words *be gentle*; and once more he came back up to me in the most serene fashion.

For several months we continued practicing daily, reinforcing this unique style of canine stair-tactics! It is true that he sometimes became so excited that he would forget his new training. At such moments his inclination always was to lunge or bolt forward.

This caused him to stumble a few times and even fall once again. But he also seemed to have gained the capacity to correct himself, readily adjusting his approach without my assistance. Nevertheless, whenever he seemed to be slipping back into his old habit of *dive-bombing*, we instantly resumed our *stair practice* together—always calmly, carefully, slowly, and very gently.

If Alex hadn't learned beforehand certain words and phrases such as gentle, paw-up, paw-down, no, no-rough, go, come, other paw, back paw, slow, lift-up, lift-up high, upstairs, and downstairs, I'm not certain whether he could have been retrained to traverse the stairs safely once more. His understanding of verbal phrases allowed him to regain, in a modified manner, important physical skills that he had lost almost entirely. Certainly, being able to continue using the stairs gave him greater freedom for several more years. More importantly, with his understanding of just these few simple words, he was able to develop a new set of walking skills—those which he never would have discovered otherwise.

A few years earlier—about the same time Alex reached his eighth birthday—I unexpectedly had an intense yearning and a renewed opportunity to increase my time spent in daily meditation. Despite having a keen awareness concerning the benefits of *sitting* silently for hours each day, there were many years when I found it impossible to spend more than ten or twenty minutes on such an enterprise, if at all.

However, by the time that I reached my early twenties, meditating already had become

a significant and sizable portion of my daily routine, proving to be transformational in every aspect of my life. Because of chronic infections, acute pain, constant high fevers, and chronic nightmares, insomnia plagued me throughout much of my childhood, my entire adolescence, and for the first few years I spent as a young adult. Nevertheless, after experiencing the multi-faceted advantages of meditating all night, I soon discovered it to be a spiritually expansive, health-inducing, and restful alternative to the hellish pangs of unending sleeplessness I endured for over two decades.

While Alex was younger, if he discovered me sitting quietly by myself, he always expected that we could play together—or at least interact in some manner. However, after considerable training, he learned to leave the room whenever I began meditating. And in later years, all I had to say was:

Alex, let's meditate now.

He briefly would stand facing me for a quick, reassuring pat on the head. Once that objective was fulfilled, his next mission was to barrel downstairs to a far spot in the library, the room adjacent to where I normally performed my silent practice. While always seated and never lying down, there he remained for the entire duration of my quiet sessions.[41] But, at the precise moment I returned to a normal state of awareness, I inevitably could hear his tail thumping with joyful anticipation, even while he remained in the next room. Somehow he always knew exactly when each meditation had ended.

During the course of this daily exercise, a common side effect was for my physical body to be enveloped in massive waves of luminous color. Bright, translucent objects also tended to float around me and about the entire room. Throughout Alex's early years, he often rushed to wherever I was seated while these incorporeal phenomena were apparent. Whenever they emanated in his presence, he immediately would look up into thin air and follow the movements of those multihued manifestations with his eyes. He often sauntered happily behind one ethereal object after another, calmly observing each of them as they drifted leisurely about the room.

Throughout my life, these synesthetic-like episodes[42] often manifested as precursors to

[41] I found it fascinating that Alex consistently sat during my meditations instead of lying down. Because he had large, bony legs that slid readily on any floor not having a rug he could use for traction, it was truly remarkable that he chose to sit for the entire length of each meditation on the bare floor. At no other time during his life could he ever manage to do this successfully.

[42] According to *World Book Encyclopedia*, synesthesia (in psychology) is:

many clairvoyant events, mystical visions, and angelic or saintly visitations. In the past, I have known numerous people who could detect these things while we meditated together. They often described what they saw in explicit detail, confirming that what all of us perceived to be seeing was precisely the same. But it was curious to me that Alex also was aware of these manifestations whether they be waves of color, levitating objects, dynamic visions, or visitations from *celestial friends*.

Alex's awareness and interest in these phenomena seemed to evolve gradually. Perhaps that is why none of them ever alarmed or frightened him. On the contrary, he acted as though they were perfectly natural and commonplace in the landscape of his life. Indeed, he loved following each apparition about the room, always wagging an impetuous tail approvingly, and frequently pulling back both lips to produce the unmistakable grin I have seen exclusively on the mug of that remarkable dog.

Despite Alex's rather unique propensity towards this sort of perception, an awareness usually associated only with humans, he certainly wasn't the only animal that I have encountered who shared preternatural experiences with me as I meditated. Indeed, there were several other pets that observed such things over the years.

During summer vacations from college, when I normally came back home to visit my parents, our inquisitive cat regularly sensed when I would begin to meditate. No matter where he was in the house, I could expect an almost immediate appearance from him at my bedroom door, yowling to be let inside.

In order to keep him from climbing predictably onto my lap while I was beginning my regular two-hour sitting session, it became necessary to shut the door securely beforehand. However, on a particularly warm summer's eve, the air was unusually hot and sticky, so the door to my room had swollen enough so it couldn't be latched at all. This offered the cat an opportunity for which he always awaited. As usual, he shoved himself up against it; but this time he was able to bust through my intended barricade and prance triumphantly forward to join me.

Already, an enormous purple and golden orb had materialized in the middle of the room. It was over five feet in diameter and hovered in midair. There were only inches between where

---

...a phenomenon in which the stimulation of one sense produces a mental impression associated with a different sense, as when hearing certain sounds causes a person to see certain colors.

I was sitting on the floor and the nearest surface of this translucent sphere.

Similarly to Alex, our cat began noticing the manifestations of my meditations gradually over time. But unlike Alex, he tended to view these otherworldly phenomena only with passing interest. Once he scanned them all with a series of nonchalant glances, he then would curl up on my bed, let out an immense, mute yawn, and slowly close his eyes in a typically feline fashion.

However, this particular orb undoubtedly had to be the largest one he ever encountered—at least, of those we witnessed together. Its sheer mass must have taken the unsuspecting kitty totally off guard. The moment he noticed this grand, glowing gem, his eyes opened so wide that they looked as though they might explode. Quickly, he raised his haunches to the max. With every ounce of fur standing on end, he let out a series of uncharacteristic hisses and growls. Then without pause, he flew out of my room in a streak of panic, not to be seen again for hours.

Before that incident, he came to my room every time I began to meditate, certainly hundreds of times. But after he was traumatized by that enormous manifestation, never again did he approach me while my silent practices were in progress.

After Alex and I moved to our home on the mountain, he began to adopt a consistent and accurate method of informing me whenever anyone approached the house. This he could do whether people were arriving by car or by foot. Despite that it was impossible for him to view those who might be coming up the front walkway, he had an uncanny ability to distinguish between friends and strangers nearing the porch. Considering that most individuals never spoke before I opened the door to greet them, his awareness of their presence nearby—and his capacity for identifying whether or not they were familiar to us—was all the more intriguing since there usually weren't even audible voices for him to recognize. Also, he almost always did this before they had an opportunity to knock on the door or ring the doorbell.

Every time unfamiliar callers showed up outside the house, he immediately would rush to the front hallway and announce their arrival by producing a single warning bark. It was distinctly deep, resonant, and unlike any other vocalizations in his *woofing* repertoire. Although he had no way to identify these visitors by sight, his tail never wagged when strangers were coming to the door.

However, if our company was even slightly familiar to him, he would rush to wherever I happened to be in the house. He almost never proclaimed the arrival of friends with barking.

Instead, he would silently look eagerly into my eyes and then turn his head towards the front door. He regularly repeated these motions until I asked if someone were at the door. As soon as I responded with this inquiry, he instantly would smile and lick his lips to indicate *yes*. Then he always rushed to the front hallway excitedly, waiting for me to greet whoever was waiting outside.

If my arrival to the door happened to be delayed even for a few seconds, he would fly back to wherever I was at the time and repeat his initial gestures. First, he always looked intently into my eyes and then thrust his gaze back in the direction of the entryway. All I had to say was:

Okay Alex, I'm coming.

Once he was certain that I planned to follow him, he instantly would bolt ahead of me and stand directly in front of the door. With his long snout resting upon the doorknob, a mighty tail would continue wagging with his predictably eager anticipation.

Another routine that he adhered to nightly was his *preparation* for our final walk before we both went off to bed. Once I completed all of my evening tasks, we regularly headed up the mountain road to a nearby state park. Our usual jaunt took us more than a mile up to the scenic picnic area where it was ideal for stargazing and viewing the distant houselights in the valley below.

However, before venturing outside, my last endeavor of the day typically was working at the computer. Alex almost never interrupted me while I continued writing. Instead, he normally rested quietly on the *bedroom* mattress in his cozy little kennel located downstairs.

It never mattered if I worked until eleven p.m., midnight, two a.m., or until dawn. He often remained invisible to me for hours, patiently awaiting the very last second of my workday. I never shut down the computer by clicking on the mouse, so there were no audible cues as to when I might be finished. But the moment I used the appropriate key command to close the word processing program, and only after my final use of that command for the evening, a faint rustling noise immediately would emanate from the room downstairs where Alex slept. A few moments later, he would be at my side.

By this time the computer was shutting itself down. To inform me that I now must make haste so we could venture out-of-doors together, he reliably would place his muzzle gently underneath one of my hands and give it a quick toss upward with his snout, compelling my

entire arm to rise considerably. As soon as I replied with, "Okay Alex, let's go", he predictably would fall in behind me. After situating himself on my heels, he always followed my every move. This was his way to be sure that I was getting ready for our nightly trek up to the park.

If I ever appeared to be straying from this objective, he would immediately come around and look directly into my face. While situating himself right in front of me, he always turned his glance repeatedly back and forth from wherever I was standing to the front door, ferociously wagging his tail and raising his eyebrows noticeably. This peculiarly human facial response was something he seemed to acquire sometime during the last five or six years of his life. He looked as if he actually were questioning whether or not I was planning to do what I had just promised.[43] Not until I assured him emphatically that we were about to take our walk did he lower his eyebrows and fall in behind me once again.

When we first started with this ritual after finishing my work each night, only occasionally did he appear to recognize the moment when I was turning off the computer. I presumed these seemingly random instances to be merely coincidental and gave them little notice. But once he consistently began showing up by my side even before I typed the instructions for my computer to shut down, I knew something curious was developing with my favorite four-legged friend.

Occasionally, I wanted to see if he might respond to my turning off the computer even if I hadn't completely finished my work yet. Only the first time I attempted this ruse was he actually duped by it. After telling him that I must continue with my writing while turning the machine back on again, I then would pledge to him apologetically that we would take our walk later.

He responded by lowering his head to an uncharacteristically droopy position; and as he released one enormous sigh after another, he slowly trudged downstairs—audibly dragging his paws every step of the way. After that one episode, there never was an instance when I was able to fool him into coming up again prematurely!

When Alex was about fourteen years old, one late night I was performing my usual routine of typing at the computer. Unexpectedly, he came to greet me long before I had planned on taking him up the mountain for our nightly jaunt to the park. Because this was such abnormal behavior for him to enter the office before I was done working, I thought something might be

[43] This was a distinctly idiosyncratic gesture that Alex began making as an older dog. But he only would do this when I obviously was forgetting to keep any spoken promise that I had just made to him. Normally, such promises included things that truly interested him such as taking a walk, preparing his dinner, going for a ride in the car, or engaging him in one of his favorite games.

wrong. First, I asked him if he needed to go to the bathroom, but he emphatically shook his head *No*. Then I questioned to see if he thought it was time for our walk. Before I had an opportunity to add that I hadn't finished working yet, he wriggled his head again, indicating another negative reply.

Instantly, he drew his lips tightly back into one of his most excellent grins. This was followed by his head turning sharply towards the front door. I was startled by his gesture because it was in the middle of the night. He never let out his warning bark to indicate the presence of a stranger nearby. Did this mean that a familiar face was about to show up at our doorstep at three a.m.?

Whenever I asked Alex if someone were at the front door, his grin stretched even further back while he licked his chops in adamant affirmation. A glossy black tail wagged passionately as he again craned his neck towards the direction of our alleged, mysterious visitor. Without further hesitation, he darted off down the hallway and around two consecutive corners to the main entryway.

Musing to myself, *Who could possibly be here at this hour*, I rose reflexively out of my office chair and quickly followed after the dog. At the far end of the hall, the corridor turned sharply to the right and then to the left before reaching the front door.

As I was navigating the final corner, I could see Alex's hind quarters swaying emphatically from side to side, supporting a tail that was shaking so wildly that it instantly became a blur to me. He definitely was facing the front door, but I had never seen him behave with so much exuberance. Undeniably, he always greeted everyone with his own, Lab-like enthusiasm; but this unbelievable exhilaration went far beyond his ordinary expressions of frenzied delight. What was it that could possibly be evoking such a stir within him now?

Once Alex came into full view, I instantly became aware that the one who had been thrilling him so entirely wasn't outside our door. He instead stood right before both of us, surrounded by a formidable aura of white and silver brilliance. After an intense, sudden shock thrust me backwards several paces—nearly stumbling me to the ground—I regained all physical balance and collected my thoughts.

Once I composed myself completely, I recognized our celestial company straight away. He had revealed himself to me in countless moments of crisis and danger. He guided me towards numerous miraculous outcomes. He remained a beacon of wisdom, hope, and protection for decades. Although he had never manifested before this time as a deeply calming, intensely

glowing, ten-foot, three dimensional, translucent apparition of the wee hours, I knew him to be a beloved friend, guardian, and guide. He was known to me for years as Michael-the-Archangel.

Alex also appeared to be exceptionally familiar with this numinous being. Actually, his apparent adoration for our visitor seemed absolute and unequivocal. As he continued lovingly to gaze upward into the countenance of his glowing comrade, Alex's lips pulled back into the widest smile I had ever seen him produce. Despite his enthrallment with the wondrous entity glowing before us, Alex always seemed capable of temporarily breaking his trance, frequently glancing back towards me to make certain that I still remained a participant in this blissful reunion.

After only a few moments, our angelic friend began speaking to me in pervasive, soothing tones. This particular visit came at a crucial juncture in my life, and he revealed several important events that would manifest for me during the next few months. As always, they materialized precisely as he described them on this particular occasion.

I was never certain whether or not Alex could also hear the mystical words uttered by Michael. Nonetheless, only during moments when the angel spoke to me did Alex sit down quietly, sharply perk up his ears, and widen his eyes considerably. At all other times, he stood at attention attentively facing our visitor, looking devoutly into the intense light emanating from Michael's face, and continually thrashing his tail at maximum velocity.

As soon as Michael's angelic visage slowly began to disappear, Alex seemed genuinely perplexed by its gradual fading from our sight. Even after the dematerialization was complete, he kept looking anxiously at me while scurrying about the hallway, inquisitively sniffing the area where we both encountered our unexpected visitor.

That particular occasion was the only time I experienced such a three-dimensional visitation with Alex at hand. Granted, there were numerous two-dimensional manifestations that we witnessed together; and throughout those instances, it was obvious that he had considerable awareness of what transpired around us, including those things I was experiencing both audibly and visually. His responsiveness and sensitivity towards these types of occurrences increased noticeably every time they happened in his presence. It might be said that his overall awareness expanded consistently with practice.

VII.

A destination with no bounds...

The final week of Alex's life began with a serious mishap that severely impacted his hind quarters, leaving him totally crippled. Within the next twenty-four hours he no longer could walk, and within another day paralysis began to inch steadily up his body. I was unable to take him to the veterinarian until the day after the accident occurred because a blizzard buried our mountain home in almost four feet of snow overnight with countless snowdrifts that were over seven feet high.

By the time our road was cleared, I finally could take Alex to the animal hospital. But between the time we left the house and when we arrived at the clinic, all electricity at the vet's suddenly had gone out. Consequently, x-raying Alex's injury couldn't be done at that time.

Because of his advanced age, the doctor speculated that he was possibly suffering from age-related hip dysplasia exacerbated by the accident. Obviously, she wasn't certain about this and needed to take x-rays to confirm her diagnosis. We discussed the option of bringing him to a well-respected veterinarian who specialized in alternative treatments. She concurred that these unorthodox approaches often proved more effective than conventional medicine if Alex's problem indeed were only hip dysplasia. However, it turned out to be impossible to get an appointment to begin those treatments for another ten days.

In the meantime, paralysis set in from Alex's chest downward and he was in constant, acute pain. During the next four days, there were three freak blizzards with no less than three feet of snow accumulation during each storm. We were downright stranded and couldn't travel anywhere.

He soon became fully incontinent and I had to carry him outside dozens of times each day so that he could tend to his increasingly frequent bathroom duties. Spending every moment of the day preparing him special food, carting him countless times in and out of raging snow storms, and cleaning him after each difficult outdoor foray, I slept no more than a half-dozen hours during the entire week.

Fortunately, amid a brief lull in the stormy weather, a student brought over several packages of adult diapers that made caring for him considerably less exhausting. During the

final three days, his paralysis became so pervasive that he was no longer capable of wagging his tail nor could he lift his head even a fraction—making it necessary for me to raise his head while I carefully fed him food or assisted him while he feebly lapped up small bits of water.

Throughout his life, Alex was always an exceptionally stoic animal. He rarely complained about anything and certainly could be considered *the strong and silent type*, almost never reacting outwardly to any pain. But in those last few days, he began to whimper uncontrollably much more regularly, even after he had to be heavily medicated. It was heartbreaking to watch my splendid friend and companion deteriorate so rapidly and completely.

As soon as the snow was cleared away and roads were passable once more, I immediately carted him to the vet's for x-rays. She discovered that several vertebrae were irreparably damaged and he was beyond any form of treatment. Each day his paralysis worsened and his suffering increased. The vet encouraged me to bring him home for one last night. Then I was to return with him the following day so she could gently assist him into a final, peaceable slumber.

I never dreamt that I would be faced with ever having to sanction euthanasia for anyone (not even for a pet) and especially not for my energetic and hearty Alex. Countless issues of ethics and morality flooded my mind that final night. When others spoke hypothetically about the attributes of *mercy killing*, in no way could I disagree with them. However, having the proposition blatantly facing me directly for the first time in my life, vast swells of unconscious doubt and remorse rose up within me. The logic of such a practice seemed worthless and empty when it involves someone that we love so deeply.

Early the next morning, after getting Alex ready for our final trip to the clinic, I spread out a large mat in the living room. It was something on which he could rest comfortably while I prepared the car for departure. I turned on a recording containing several pieces of music that always seemed to touch him greatly. Bright sunshine saturated the room for the first time in several weeks. While he lay quietly on the floor, his entire being illuminated within pervasive beams of dazzling daylight. As Antonin Dvořák's pieces for violin and piano flooded the empty space around him with sweet melodies, tears streamed steadily from his eyes, permeating every bit of his smooth facial fur.

Additionally, he actually had strength enough to pull back his lips into an incredibly serene smile. It was the only time after his accident when he actually seemed to have attained some semblance of peace. With bright light engulfing him entirely, his countenance was

breathtaking—both beautiful and tragic simultaneously. Seeing him like that in his final hours, I sobbed silently while continuing preparations for our last journey together.

Once I placed him gently on a thick quilt just behind the driver's seat in my van, we headed down the road with more of Dvořák's music playing in the background. As I drove steadily towards our fateful destination, I continually reached behind my seat, stroking lightly his soft face and ears with my fingers, while tenderly speaking words of encouragement and comfort.

After reaching the animal hospital, one of the vet's assistants aided me in carrying Alex into a small room. This kindly helper already had placed a fresh blanket on the floor where we could place my ailing friend. Once he was situated comfortably, Alex and I were left alone for more than a half-hour so we could say our final farewells. As soon as we were by ourselves, I began tenderly caressing his silky ears, telling him that all suffering was soon about to end.

Throughout most of my life, certain saints and angels would come to me without any prompting—not even by my uttering the most meagre of prayers nor through any supplication issued silently from within the depths of my soul. They occasionally appeared to me unannounced while offering me protection, wisdom, healing, guidance, and predicting many important changes in my life that definitely were fulfilled in ways that were completely unforeseeable. Although their surprising appearances often proved to be disconcerting momentarily, these ephemeral presences always felt to me more like visits from my dearest, most beloved friends rather than some unapproachable and lofty beings gracing me with their ineffable presence.

Even though they normally revealed themselves without any prior promptings from me, there still were rare occasions when I especially felt a need for specific guidance or protection in certain critical situations. It was only then that I actually would initiate a prayer and call on Archangel Michael or some other celestial intermediary.

Such was the circumstance when I was alone with Alex in his final few moments here on earth. I actually felt the need to observe those words of Saint Ambrose spoken nearly two millennia ago:

> We should pray to the angels, for they are given to us as guardians.[44]

[44] Aurelius Ambrosius (340–397 CE) was a Roman governor of Liguria and Emilia (based in Milan) before his appointment as Bishop of Milan in 374.

Indeed, I spoke a silent supplication to the great, winged intercessor Michael to shelter dearest Alex in the afterlife and pilot his transition out of this world.

The moment I uttered my entreaty there was an instantaneous magnetization around my head. Unseen hands steered my vision away from my four-legged companion of nearly sixteen years and upward towards a far corner of the ceiling. A light-filled tunnel opened at that location in the room and Michael instantly materialized within it.

When I recognized that this definitely was my angelic intermediary, Alex suddenly began to stir. Although paralysis now had consumed virtually all of his body, he lifted his neck a full ninety degrees upward, turned his head sharply towards the celestial manifestation facing us, wagged his tail with three enormous and energetic whacks, and dropped swiftly back down to the floor where again his entire corporeal-self re-immobilized. None of these motions had he been able to accomplish for days. A minute later the vet entered the room; and with great compassion and sympathy, she unlocked the doorway for my dear dog's departure from this life. During this process Michael looked on silently. After Alex left us, Michael also vanished.

While I drove home from the clinic, my mood remained calm and introspective. But in the midst of this quietude a large, wet, canine nose nuzzled my ears from behind, a routine Alex often instituted with his sizable muzzle whenever he sensed that I needed to be consoled. Because such an occurrence was totally unexpected at this time, I found myself automatically touching each ear with my fingers, discovering that there indeed were significant patches of cool, sticky slime. They were identical to those created by Alex's rubbery snout while that snout of his still existed in physical form.

For countless months thereafter, this phenomenon recurred dozens of times. When I least expected it to happen, one of my ears suddenly would become extremely wet and soggy. Simultaneously, it was nudged gently and continuously by an invisible, *nose-sized* object.

Other similar reminders of my favorite dog's presence also persisted. One afternoon, a deep and resonant warning bark emanated abruptly from the front hall. It was the kind of bark that Alex used exclusively for announcing the presence of strangers. I happened to be doing some light bookkeeping in my office when I heard that unique vocalization of his. Completely forgetting he was no longer around, I rushed down the hallway to find him and to discover who might be approaching the house outside.

However, when I quickly remembered that no *physical* Alex could have produced the bark I had just heard, I thought for a brief instant that this occurrence simply may have been an

auditory hallucination. However, the doorbell suddenly rang overhead only moments later. I immediately opened up the door to find an unfamiliar man standing before me with a disarmingly cheerful smile. He cordially introduced himself while inquiring if I was familiar with a certain address nearby. Apparently, he was hoping to visit someone in the vicinity and stopped by simply to ask for directions.

I mused that the most recent barking I heard possibly emanated from out-of-doors. Perhaps, it was just a neighborhood hound. Yet, the intensity of this unexpected noise indicated that it definitely couldn't have originated in any place other than the front hall. Moreover, there weren't any dogs nearby who were capable of producing such a sound. It could be none other than the unique utterance Alex saved for proclaiming the presence of strangers. Considering very few unfamiliar faces ever appeared at our doorstep, this particular bark was heard only on special occasions such as this one.

Besides, after the unexpected visitor thanked me for directing him to the address for which he had been searching, his gaze suddenly stretched beyond where I stood, examining the hallway and the entire living room. Looking inquisitively into my eyes, he blurted out all at once:

By the way, where's your dog?

I heard him barking a minute ago.

What kind do you have?

What's his name?

Apparently, I wasn't the only one who noticed the single *woof* that emanated from inside the front door. Not knowing what else to say, I simply stated that my dog was a black Lab named Alex. Almost reflexively, I immediately called out his name, as if I actually expected him to appear by my side once more. But when no dog emerged, I half-jokingly suggested to my visitor that he must have vanished into thin air. The man nodded, smiled, and thanked me again for my help. After saying his good-byes to me, he made a brisk about-face and promptly returned to his car.

During our romps through the woods together, there always was a series of well-practiced routines Alex and I followed dutifully throughout the course of each trek. Naturally, it took us many months to achieve consistent results. If our walks began in busy tourist areas, he remained on a leash (heeling by my side) until we passed into quieter, less-traveled regions.

However, once we left the crowds behind, the leash was removed and I could allow him to run free. But before beginning his well-cherished romp through the woods, I always asked him to *sit and stay* while I continued walking up the trail by myself.

After continuing several hundred feet ahead of him, I then would turn around to face my eagerly awaiting dog. Because it was often difficult for Alex to distinguish between my various spoken requests at such distances, I discovered that using broadly-gestured hand signals to accompany my verbal commands proved very effective.

The moment I gave him the signal, releasing him from his obligation to sit and stay, his quiet, motionless self immediately exploded into a surging, volcanic black streak charging forward thunderously. Oftentimes, with lips pulled back so tightly that his maniacal grin could be seen even from my distant position, this muscular burst of canine bulk regularly rocketed ahead in a flight of primal ecstasy. His breakneck bolt always continued several hundred feet beyond where I stood. Once this was accomplished, his tendency was to come to an abrupt stop, vigorously sniff the ground about him, and then casually saunter off into the woods—searching for whatsoever he was inclined to investigate on such occasions.

Whenever we were out on one of our forest adventures, Alex normally remained far ahead of me. After every twenty minutes or so, it became his custom to backtrack from wherever he was and return to wherever I happened to be at the time. If he had diverted off-trail, he readily could be seen diving back onto the path before his final approach to my position. Once he returned, his ritual was to halt several feet ahead of wherever I was standing, look into my eyes, and wag his tail fiercely.

For some unknown reason, our hikes together were the only times when he never came up to me for a reassuring pat. Considering that these loving bumps on the butt or on his head were a frequent interaction between us, normally taking place dozens of times daily, it was odd that he always kept his distance from me solely during hiking excursions.

I surmised that these cherished romps through the woods were rousing enough to surpass his otherwise-endless need for such solicitations. The only way I could get him to venture close enough so that I could administer a quick *thump* on his backside was by commanding him to come to me directly. He always responded obediently, but with seeming reluctance and considerable impatience. Nevertheless, once released from this obligation, he would fly off instantaneously in a furious blaze down the trail and out of sight.

However, as soon as we arrived at any of our regular destinations—whatever

mountaintop, scenic view, waterfall, pool, pond, or cliff I chose to visit that day—his mood often changed dramatically. Only after observing the removal of my increasingly heavy backpack from tired shoulders would Alex surmise that we were no longer on the move. A well-deserved respite was at hand. Instantly, he would throttle down to a standstill and often lie contentedly by my side. It was at these rare moments during hiking that Alex might indicate his desire for our normally affectionate communions to resume.

But while we remained in motion, trekking from one place to another, his periodic appearances before me always stayed predictably short and snappy. In other words, those brief reunions were strictly for *business*. After he checked in to indicate that he was all right, his immediate desire was to be off and running once more.

Normally, Alex lingered only long enough so I might thank him for showing up again. However, the instant I mentioned that he could take his leave of me, a hasty exit was inevitable. He never resurfaced until making the next, fleeting appearance to which I often referred as one of his split-second *check-ins*.

At night, I sometimes wanted to know where he was more often than usual. So if I called out for him too soon after his last showing, he developed a clever alternative to coming all the way back to my current location. Over time, he understood that by shaking his collar vigorously, I could hear his several attached dog tags clinking together and subsequently surmise where he was.

So when he didn't wish to return to me, he simply jiggled his collar continuously. Once I heard this clanking signal I would call back to him:

There you are! Thanks Alex, you're a good dog.

As soon as I shouted out my response, the rattling of dog tags ended instantly. They never recurred again until some future occasion when I might insist on knowing where he was.

Sometimes there were too many dins, clatters, and clamors filling the air—such as the nearby rumblings from rapids or waterfalls—for me also to distinguish the more subtle sounds produced by jangling dog tags. At night, when we were experiencing moments like those, he discovered that by simply walking directly into the far-reaching beams of light glowing from my lantern, I could see him from considerable distances. His eyes readily glowed like a pair of dazzling, golden topazes, always gleaming brighter and increasingly growing larger as we drew closer to each other.

When his approach towards me appeared abnormally slow (returning solely out of duty, rather than with his usual display of unstinting enthusiasm), it indicated that he was getting really tired. Whenever this happened I often called out to him:

I see you, Alex. Good boy! You can go now.

After hearing my reply, his gleaming eyes immediately would vanish while his shrouded form veered back into the darkened boondocks.

During all of the years that we hiked together, if he chose to jingle his dog tags, he never would feel the need also to jump onto the trail so I might see his eyes gleaming in lantern light. Yet, if he chose to return to the pathway so I could spot his eyes shining brightly before me, he never shook his collar. He seemed to understand that only one of these signals was necessary for me to keep track of him.

Likewise, if his approach toward me happened to be on the trail, but not in direct line with the lantern, I couldn't always see him. But if I cried out, "Alex, where are you?", he immediately would veer into the light so I could locate him instantly.

Aside from when we were hiking, he also shook his collar occasionally while we were at home. Yet, he did this only as a response to when I called out for him, wanting to know where he was. Even after Alex departed from this life, not only would I sometimes feel a wet nudge behind my ears while I was driving the car (as I mentioned earlier), but I frequently heard dog tags jangling, regardless of whether I was hiking or at home, even at times when other people experienced these occurrences alongside of me.

To this day, during countless walks after dusk, a pair of bright, golden orbs have often appeared before me on the trail. The moment I thought to myself reflexively, "Hi Alex, thanks for letting me know where you are", those shining objects would instantly vanish. He also has occasionally visited my mind's eye and more infrequently has materialized outwardly as a luminous, three-dimensional being. While spreading magnificent, incandescent wings, he now speaks remarkable words of compassion and wisdom in the human tongue.

These wondrous manifestations are the perfect reminder that he is always present. Just beyond the illusory veils of this dualistic, material realm, he persists as a beauteous, angelic force—or so I would deem him to be. Deep within the center of my being, and equally as a part of celestial realms, he continues to reside with me: smiling, exuberant, in unison, forever.

VIII.

Meaningful interludes with birds and a beast...

I thought that it might be beneficial to take a brief intermission from Alex's exploits before concluding with a final episode recounting how in later years he developed the uncanny ability to understand and respond to human speech far beyond anything that I could have imagined previously.

As a young boy I learned from my mother to coax certain members of our local bird population to take sunflower seeds directly out of my hands. At first, I would whistle or chirp a passable rendition of their own unique birdcalls until they responded by flying over to me. However, after several months of using this approach, I eventually discovered that communicating with them in such a way took much more time than was actually necessary.

Finally, I became so confident with the belief of being able to have them perch on my fingers with their spindly little feet that I began inviting certain birds to roost on my shoulders just by *thinking* the notion silently, without ever uttering a single syllable aloud. This technique seemed to be effective even when I had no edible treats with which to entice them. Once they started flying down (alighting on my head or shoulders after receiving only the slightest, silent promptings), I could also persuade them to remain there for several minutes using the same voiceless technique.

During some of those extended visits, they often sang enthusiastically while clinging to my shiny crop of bright red hair, and I happily attempted to mimic their beautiful melodies with my own feeble chirpings in return. Surprisingly, they didn't seem to mind those amateurish attempts engaging with them in their jubilant songfest, so they simply continued wholeheartedly to harmonize with me in our impromptu duets—employing their native dialect of either chickadee, nuthatch, goldfinch, or sparrow.

There were countless times during my life when all I had to do was invite a nearby bird (telepathically perhaps) to come and visit for a while, and in a flash it would accept my muted invitation by instantly landing on my head or shoulders without hesitation. This typical interaction would arise no matter where I happened to be at the time, both with those familiar *bird fellows* who had already made my acquaintance or with many others who indeed were total

strangers. It didn't seem to matter whether or not we had met before. In all of the years when they flew over to me and parked on my person so willingly, none of them ever appeared reluctant to do so.

In more recent times, several places where I have lived just happened to be home to various strains of hummingbirds.[45] Adorned in plumage of a wide range of color and luminosity, I always found them to be amazing creatures to behold. Their presence frequently instilled in me an indescribable sense of wonder and joy. Although none of those high-energy, avian speedballs would ever land on my body and sit totally still, they instead tended to hover directly in front of my face and occasionally remained there for minutes at a time.

There was one specific incident when an unusually bright, emerald-green hummer came so close to my own nose that if I had taken one step forward I could have bumped into its slender beak without ever having to stretch out my neck in order to do so. That exceptionally gorgeous creature had facial characteristics that resembled those of a winged, miniaturized, humanlike entity; and when it hovered so close to me, I could see its anthropomorphic expressions that seemed to be conveying an urgent message—one which I unfortunately failed to comprehend at the time.

Perhaps, if I remembered how I once was able to communicate with other avian creatures during my childhood, the results at this particular moment would have been even more astounding than it already was. However, I might not have had an immediate success along those lines, because over the years I came to be very much out of practice attempting such interactions. (When I speak of being *out of practice* in this instance, my use of the expression not only refers to the physical act of calling a bird over to me, but also infers that I was totally out of practice *believing* in my capacity to do such a thing in the first place. In upcoming chapters, I will go into further detail of how and why belief is such an important derivative of thought needing to be cultivated through *conscious gardening*—another term expanded upon later in the book.)

---

[45] Almost all of my encounters with hummingbirds occurred while I was living in northern New England either in New Hampshire or neighboring Vermont. When I described the various hummingbird varieties I discovered in the region, several people emphatically declared that this was an impossibility because only one type of hummingbird is indigenous to our area. Their assertions totally baffled me because I definitely witnessed many more than just the male and female counterparts of one single strain.

Fortunately, sometime thereafter—when I was doing further research on the subject—I stumbled upon an Internet video that fortunately vindicated me for my claims about seeing so many different varieties of hummingbirds locally. Apparently, there are two times each season when a wide assortment of hummers pass through our vicinity. It certainly must have been during those migrations periods when I was fortunate enough to witness so many beautiful and diverse varieties.

There is another especially memorable encounter with hummingbirds that is worth telling now. A Russian painter was being featured in an ongoing art exhibit in nearby Vermont and had spent most of that summer in northern New England. At the time, I still happened to be living in the White Mountains of New Hampshire (more than forty miles from the Vermont border), but after meeting him during a concert held in my village, he told me about the art show featuring his work and hoped that I would drive over to see it. While visiting his wonderful exhibit, we started to have an interesting conversation. Along the way, I discovered that this Russian fellow hadn't yet been given the opportunity to trek into the mountains, so I invited him to come with Alex and me on an afternoon hike in the White Mountain National Forest.

A few days after my visit to his art show, he traveled east into the mountains to visit me. We had already planned to meet that morning and have the afternoon and evening to hike. But before readying ourselves to head out onto the trails, we first decided to have a bit of lunch.

As I escorted him into the sunporch for our noonday meal, whispers of warm wind readily awaited us there while they sifted softly through the room. Simultaneously—and at much higher altitudes out-of-doors—we could see from our vantage in the glassed-in porch that there were more forcible currents propelling a pair of falcons that kited effortlessly across the azure sky. They continued their choreographed flight for nearly an hour. To accompany them with musical strains, there were more earthbound breezes rousing several windchimes in the porch to resound melodiously far beyond the confines of the house itself.

While my visitor was obviously enjoying the pleasant chorus of sounds emanating from those various sets of bells, tubes, and resonant plates, he gradually took notice of the silvery set of pewter hummingbird chimes tinkling quietly above his head. Once he began to examine them, he asked whether I had ever seen actual hummingbirds in real life and did these specific windchimes have any personal significance for me.

Aside from their representing one of my favorite birds, I also mentioned what an old, tribal medicine man once told me that has echoed in my mind for quite some time. His native ancestors envisioned the spirit of these fluttery little creatures as being the embodiment of joy.[46]

[46] It would be worthwhile to note here that anyone who has spent a lot of time around hummingbirds would not necessarily be inclined to associate them with joy, let alone proclaiming them as the quintessence of such. In fact, some might emphatically decry this idea as being ludicrous—considering that certain varieties of hummingbirds tend to be highly territorial and especially combative with other members of their own species. They can be especially aggressive when it comes to their food supply and often are seen smashing headlong, repeatedly, and at high speeds into other hummers

It is definitely spot-on to say that their overall loveliness, amazing maneuverability in flight, and exceptional speed are ample reasons in themselves to bestow upon us a genuine sense of amazement and wonder. But I also found that whenever I came across any of their kind, such encounters always made me feel exceedingly happy. This was the case long before that native shaman made me aware of how his tribe regarded them for countless generations in the past.

While reflecting upon those particular ideas with my newfound artist friend, he then spoke of how these incredible birds have always incited within him deep feelings of delight. And ever since he was a young boy, he had the persistent dream of someday holding one of these tiny fellows in the palm of his hand even though they didn't dwell in Russia where he normally resided.

As our conversation progressed, he urged me to tell him more about my *Mind Garden* book. I was working on it even back then in 2000 when he came to visit, although it was still part of the first version at the time. After all, as was mentioned earlier in the Preface, I didn't begin to write this current rendition of the mind garden material until I eventually wound up living in the Northeast Kingdom—after discovering that almost the entire manuscript had been destroyed in 2007 by the infamous flood.

It appeared that the topics covered in my book were of great interest to him because many of them contained themes that he liked to portray in his artwork. He often used such

---

while they are trying to feed in close proximity to one another.

Nevertheless, like all archetypal labels we use to express the noblest traits of any species or group (inspired by our own human aspirations), the belief that a true essence of hummingbirds is the actual embodiment of joy is no more or less true than saying human beings epitomize the highest degree of intelligence, wisdom, and consciousness among all other lifeforms here on earth. Yet, we frequently prove to be equally stupid, cruel, inept, and unaware, even more so than other animals at times.

A further example of this sort of irony (out of an inestimable number of possibilities) is how most people think of puppies and even adult dogs. We can't help but to see them as the ultimate in adorability and devotion—despite that these innocent-looking fluffballs might also be found chewing up an irreplaceable family photo album, peeing on our favorite furniture, devouring our dinner left unattended, occasionally scrapping with other loveable-looking *doggies* over remnants of a rotting carcass, or rolling gleefully in their own ordure.

Whenever we perceive any species or group as being an ultimate symbol of virtue (or anything else we might desire to exemplify to the highest degree), there is always the possibility of it simply being an anthropomorphization promoting our own wishful thinking. But this is not always the case…

If we look at such idealizing from the perspective of a mind gardener, the practice of utilizing this kind of thought is like employing any others we might happen to repeat over and over again. The more that we reiterate specific thoughts or ideas, eventually they are likely to become beliefs or (at least) some part of a belief. And if said beliefs are enhanced by also utilizing additional thoughts reinforced by complementary emotions and actions, it is not uncommon for actual manifestations to occur subsequently.

So if we perceive the appearance of hummingbirds as the spirit of joy entering our lives whenever they grace us with their presence—especially when our belief in this notion is well-formed—then it is a great likelihood of such a conviction becoming at least a small part of our tangible reality in some way as well. Regardless of whether or not we accept the ancient tribal view of this being actually true, who doesn't feel a surge of joy and wonder when one of these fairy-like creatures comes right up to our faces, hovers like a tiny helicopter, and compels us to smile if only for an instant?

subjects as the recurring ideas for his paintings—both in oils and in watercolors as well. Eventually, our discussion about the book material began to circle back into our earlier exchange about hummingbirds and their seemingly archetypical personification of joy. We covered many themes found in my writings, especially those concerning how every thought has the potential for manifesting physical reality. But, as our lunchtime visit was concluding, I offered one last observation that touched upon both my mind garden philosophies and our mutual love of hummingbirds:

> I have often considered that the spirit of joy not only might be radiating from these exceptional birds themselves but also from any *thoughts* simply suggesting their ability to manifest that joyful essence. As for the windchimes, every time I hear them ringing softly throughout the house, their gentle tones remind me of those strange and beautiful birds; and they equally serve as a musical affirmation reflecting and magnifying the joy that is said to be an inherent part of their nature. It continually reminds me to replenish myself regularly with this joy and share it with everyone I meet.

Once we finished talking about these winged *manifestations of joy*, we also discussed other exceptional birds found locally—such as those falcons still flying overhead, loons and herons on nearby lakes, and rare but spectacular appearances from both bald eagles and the golden variety as well.

As soon as our meal was finished, we decided to gather up the gear essential for our mountain hike. Most of what we would need for the trip happened to be out in the garage, so we took all of our dishes from lunch and dropped them off in the kitchen before proceeding to the garage entrance at the end of a short corridor. As soon as we opened the door, both of us noticed that an actual hummingbird appeared to be trapped in there. It had inadvertently flown through the open overhead door facing the driveway.

Apparently seeing light coming through a set of large windows at the back end of the garage, this little hummer apparently headed towards them instead. But when it couldn't pass beyond their numerous glass panels, the poor bird began frantically pounding itself against them while attempting to escape. (Interestingly enough, this was the first hummingbird that I had ever seen while living at that house despite having resided there for several years.)

We were both enthralled by coming across a real-live *specimen* after just admiring those chiming, pewter replicas hanging in the sunporch. After all, the both of us had been having a

very lively conversation about these exotic little beings during our lunch. Almost reflexively, I began generating thoughts with the mindful intention of calming this one down so we could guide it back outside through the open door:

There's nothing to fear. We're here to help. Come with us and we'll show you the way out!

No sooner had my mind resonated with those thoughts when my friend looked eagerly into my eyes and asked if it might be possible for him to coax the bird into his slightly cupped hands. I smiled and nodded in agreement with him that it would definitely be okay to do so, even though I had never before experienced seeing anyone actually hold a hummingbird. (Though, years later, I did eventually learn an effective technique for having them land in my hands quite readily.)

So, as we slowly approached our exhausted avian visitor that particular day, it simply hopped softly into the outstretched hands of my expectant guest. Both of us were absolutely overjoyed by this unanticipated response from the bird, especially since my friend had just told me a few minutes earlier that to actually hold a hummingbird had been a dream of his for as long as he could remember. The fragile creature surprisingly sat there in complete stillness, not even flitting its wings in the slightest.

This poor, feathery wisp of a fellow seemed to be totally exhausted; but to trust its tiny self so readily to the care of a *humanoid giant* was something truly remarkable for us at the time, and we both were grateful to be unwitting accomplices in such an enterprise. Although I cannot imagine that it was experiencing even an ounce of *joy* after its harrowing ordeal, we wingless, two-legged creatures definitely were!

So after exchanging volleys of both incredulous and blissful glances back and forth between us—gazing upon this lovely hummingbird for what seemed to be ages on end—we eventually escorted it tenderly into the open air. After a minute longer, revived by the sudden rays of sunbeams bathing its little hummer face and the fragrances found only in fresh open air, it finally flitted across the mountain meadow to freedom and to countless woodland refuges beyond.

Aside from my many interactions with a wide variety of birds, I have had countless *conversations* with many other animals as well. Among them were memorable exchanges with moose, snowshoe hares, bumble bees, and deer to name just a few. But one of the most surprising *discussions* I ever experienced came about during a walk near the Connecticut River

after midnight.

At the time, I resided in a studio loft apartment. It consisted of the entire upper portion of a modest, older barn located just on the Vermont side of the river. Its entrance was only a few hundred feet from a steep set of stairs descending sharply to the shoreline, where the endless procession of water continually rolled by with a seemingly casual (yet unrelenting) persistence. Moreover, an assortment of New Hampshire mountains could be seen off in the distance as well.

On one balmy summer's eve, I decided to leave the barn and head out to the end of the driveway. From there, I started up the sparsely-traveled road heading north. Most through-traffic had been diverted to the nearby interstate ages ago, so the state highway wasn't used much as a connecting thoroughfare anymore.

Consequently, it became one of my favorite places for taking long walks, especially at night. During each of those walks, it never ceased to amaze me that I always became instantly enthralled when facing this amazing series of breathtaking vistas—virtually, one right after another. As the roadway meandered through the area, much of it was located on significantly higher ground than the river itself. Consequently, that is why there were so many breathtaking views to be taken in and enjoyed. Many of them revealed numerous perspectives of those mountains, the adjoining hills, and that long, winding river—all in the twilight of evening, through moonless midnights, and into those mysterious crepuscular moments when misty fogs of dawn sift slowly upward from beneath an awakening horizon.

At the late hour when I began that particular stroll, the road was totally deserted. Oftentimes, not even a single car would appear until daybreak. It was ideal for my frequent contemplative sojourns out-of-doors, which allowed me regular opportunities for delving into such invisible, intangible realms of renewal and peace. At the time, it seemed as though I were nearly floating euphorically along one edge of this paved byway while eventually feeling that someone (or something) was nearby and keeping pace with every step I took.

When first surveilling the expanse from where I felt this presence was emanating, nothing out of the ordinary appeared to be there. Only still and silent meadow grasses stretched away from the deserted highway towards the forest edge nearly a hundred feet away. However, after stopping to consider further what I had just interpreted as a noticeable *imposition* upon my solitude, suddenly there was a soft rustling sound emanating only inches from where I stood.

After looking directly down at my feet, I discovered who had been accompanying me for

the past several minutes. It was a very large skunk! The second that I saw who was beside me, the unanticipated realization triggered a fleeting instant of spontaneous shock and surprise; and at that exact moment, a beautiful, bushy, black-and-white tail immediately rose high into the air. Simultaneously, there were faint yet undeniable traces of a singularly caustic aroma. Although they were just a miniscule sampling of what might possibly be released without further notice, this remarkably pale preamble stung both my nostrils nevertheless.

If I held onto the reflexive dread coursing through every fiber of my body in that instant (and allowed it to augment further), there definitely would have been more than a slight chance of my receiving direct blasts of this formidable skunk oil in the not-so-distant future. However, I instead let go of those explicable fears almost as quickly as they came upon me; and amazingly, this *Pepé-Le-Pewish* walking fellow of mine seemed to recognize how my internalized emotions suddenly transformed from alarm and panic back into my earlier state of serenity.

In response, the lovely striped tail accompanying me was lowered without hesitation.[47] Furthermore, no other unpleasant fumes were emitted again that night.

Then something compelled me to smile down at the now-seemingly innocuous *individual* pacing itself in time to my own footsteps. The moon just re-emerged from behind an enormous waft of cumulous cloud and bore brightly down upon a pair of both radiant and curious eyes. They indeed were peering up at me; and as soon as I began walking forward again, this truly handsome creature also resumed a casual saunter at my flank—forever matching every silent step that I took.

For countless minutes, our contemplative journey together went like this: as long as I continued moving ahead, it also proceeded forward—never leaving my side. Sometimes it came so close that I could feel a slight tickling sensation across my bare leg whenever it rubbed up against me ever so slightly. Yet, each time I decided to rest (even for the briefest of moments), it too would halt while often casting an enquiring glance in my direction. But once having received a few optimistic and softly spoken words I would readily provide in return, it seemed to be quite satisfied with such reassurances and often embarked on a secondary objective of snuffling upon the nearby grasses—that is to say, until I happened to start walking again. Then,

[47] Pepé Le Pew was a Warner Brothers' cartoon character first introduced to the public in 1945. He portrayed a love-stricken skunk who spoke with a French accent. In every episode that I ever watched as a child, Pepé could be found predictably falling madly in love with a cat who had black and white markings greatly resembling his own. This feline object of his desire happened to be one *Penelope Pussycat* who he perpetually terrorized with his odiferous advances.

without hesitation, it immediately stepped back in stride once more to accompany me on our nocturnal jaunt through the moonlight.

As each minute passed by during our quiet time together, having that peculiar companion by my side started to feel comfortable, even comforting to me. In fact, I must admit that such camaraderie was greatly appreciated. During the course of our stroll, something suddenly prompted me to initiate an intermittent conversation tenderly between us.

Any unlikely bystander hiding behind an occasional tree or signpost might have thought this *chat* of ours rather one-sided. Perhaps, it was more likely to appear as being a soliloquy on my part. Nevertheless, any time I might begin to speak softly, my lovely black-and-white chaperon would look directly into my eyes and begin uttering something that can only be described as a gentle sort of whimper. There was finally a point in this unique interaction between my own human personage and that skunk from the wilds when I sensed that it desired to leave me and head off in other directions. Without hesitation, I proceeded to mention it being okay if it needed to go somewhere else now. But I also added how happy I was to have made such a wonderful friend. And then, I simply wished it well and said good-bye.

As soon as I finished saying these words, it looked again into my eyes with great import and snuffled a slight snort; and with an unexpected sneeze, this nocturnal traveling fellow deviated from our current trajectory and moseyed down a grassy slope towards the rolling, wooded canopy below. Several times it looked back in my direction. When finally reaching the edge of this brief meadow, it turned around to gaze at me once more. I raised my hand in final farewell, and then (for the last time) my amiable *skunkish* fellow turned and descended towards the profound shadows of forestland fast approaching and diminished into the nearly indistinguishable waves of shrouding mists.

Aside from the interactions just mentioned, I have been fortunate to have had dozens of other exchanges in which wild animals readily *conversed* with me on one level or another. There were many occasions when they even appeared to initiate the dialogue. Although there were also an equal number of instances when I questioned the validity of labeling such interactions as *conversations* (or any other type of definite communication whatsoever), I nevertheless would reassess those situations countless times in my head and always arrive at the same conclusion in the end:

They could be nothing other than genuine exchanges between one or another animal species

and me.

Moreover, thanks to the Internet, a large collection of videos posted by individuals from all walks of life revealed that I haven't been the only person who has had many of these amazing *discourses* with a variety of both domestic and wild animals alike. There is now much documented evidence that a wide range of species have been able to demonstrate fairly sophisticated methods of interaction that could be thought of as alternative forms of speech.

Moreover, because there is so much more evidence collected in this area of research now than even a few years ago, an increase of experts in the field do hold the view that many creatures other than the human variety are much more intelligent than was thought previously (as was mentioned before), and many of those various genera actually display observable signs of consciousness.

Such animals have oftentimes been seen making deliberate choices in their actions, interactions, and how they actually communicate with others of their own kind—and in their attempts to converse directly with us as well.

Although I often spoke aloud with birds—as well as with other animals such as my skunkish companion mentioned above—there were many times when we otherwise *conversed* silently. For lack of a better way of putting it, such communications might be considered as some sort of extrasensory interaction—in other words, just another way we can manifest the utilization of thought.

A series of truly memorable instances happened when I decided to try using a sort of *silent speech* soon after arriving at the cabin in northern Vermont. Because of so many disruptive events having recently occurred in my life (and still being ever present on my mind), there were many days when nothing seemed to console me—not arduous exercise, nor several hours of daily meditation, nor even the most fervent of prayers. None of the usual antidotes had any lasting effect on my traumatized state of being. It soon became apparent that other means were desperately needed to remove these burdens.

What turned out to be one of the most effective remedies for any time when I found myself in despair—inundated with inconsolable sadness—frequently came through a series of unprompted encounters with wild animals. In some of the traditional beliefs still being practiced in this region, it is considered that these so-called happenstances are nothing other than a form of divine intervention. Perhaps the most profound of these memorable *meetings* came while I

still was acclimating to the intense isolation there.

A splendid female hawk began making visits to the cabin. At first, nothing seemed out of the ordinary. I often lived in places where other members of her majestic species would swoop and circle high in the air while scouting the terrain beneath them for potential teatime morsels.

But once this hawk had been steadily showing up on a daily basis, I suddenly realized that her arrival each morning happened almost as if she were keeping an ongoing appointment with me. Her feathered countenance would appear quite dependably around eleven o'clock, rain or shine. Certainly, there were days when she might fly into sight somewhat earlier or swoop overhead on rare occasions after midday, but for the several years that this daily encounter persisted, she remained amazingly punctual, even more so than some humans who had made routine appointments with me over the years.

At first, I thought that I must be imagining her accurate timekeeping abilities, so I started checking each anticipated arrival with my kitchen clock and was amazed how reliable almost all of them tended to be. I still do not have the foggiest notion how or why she remained on such a precise schedule. But day after day (and year after year), she persisted in her late-morning social calls. They were a great consolation to me because all of those visits from my high-flying *friend* were oftentimes the only ones that I had for weeks or months on end.

During the winter season, when the outdoor environment was amazingly still and devoid of most signs of life, I especially missed hearing her familiar cries; and when the late-winter and early-spring snowstorms would subside, I often went down the driveway in hopes of hearing her sorely missed hawk calls echoing across the hilltops. But despite my occasional premature yearnings for her springtime appearances to resume, her actual arrival back into the area oftentimes was still several weeks away.

She normally returned in late April or early May, remained throughout the summer months, and finally headed south just a few weeks before the first snowfall. I was fortunate to have her visit me daily for well over a decade. However (in 2018), soon after the summer months receded into autumn, I was never greeted by her familiar cry ever again. I can only assume that she made a final exodus from the north country and eventually flew off to those higher and more rarified altitudes of her own hawkish heaven, well beyond the human ability to recognize or comprehend.

But while she still came around each morning during the warmer months, my great winged friend beckoned to me repeatedly with her distinctly high-pitched cries of *kee-*

eeeeeeee.[48] Although ornithologists and many birdwatchers often refer to such buteo[49] calls as screeches or screams, I always found their unique sounds to be curiously comforting in a bright, clear, yet plaintive way—not *screechy* at all.

Each day I could expect the first of numerous flybys during my morning writing sessions. If I hadn't already come outside to take a break just before eleven o'clock (something which I often did in anticipation of her daily reappearance), she tended to swoop down lower than usual so as to venture close to the cabin's roof while beginning her familiar song. As soon as she got my attention, I immediately would discontinue whatever I happened to be doing and rush out the door onto the deck where I could watch her kite upon those cloudless currents streaming high above me.

Considering how I had always called out my greetings to birds either aloud or silently in my head ever since my mother showed me the way to get them to perch on my hands, my shoulders, or even on my head, I reflexively started greeting this hawk in a similar manner. Without exception, anytime I directed my salutations towards her with either my voice or my mind, she instantly cried back without a moment's hesitation. At first, I thought that I was reading into this seemingly *personalized* response, but year after year she continued with her instantaneous replies thousands and thousands of times without fail.[50]

Once we acknowledged each other in this manner (occasionally extending our dialog to include other pleasantries and concerns of the moment), almost instantly thereafter the magnificent lady would begin to extend her airborne spiraling further and further outward—away from my tiny abode in this dense forest—until finally breaking out of her present flight pattern to sail off towards hills and mountains elsewhere.

When I began considering this daily occurrence as a routine deliberately orchestrated by my avian caller, I started to laugh at myself for thinking that she was actually intending to greet me every day before flying away to other destinations. But this continued happening all season long until warmer regions beckoned her to travel southbound for the winter. After my first year with her, there was no disputing that she definitely indicated to me her intentions to

---

[48] This is the cry of the broad-winged hawk and can be heard above many of the rural vistas found in New Hampshire and Vermont.

[49] According to *Merriam-Webster*, buteos are:

> …any of a genus (*Buteo*) of hawks with broad rounded wings, relatively short tails, and soaring flight.

[50] It is interesting to note here that although I have attempted to greet others of her species in the same manner ever since she made her final departure, there has never been another hawk who has ever responded to my greetings in such a consistent and predictable manner.

communicate.

In the course of our ongoing exchanges (which also happened to be at a time when my thoughts were wandering constantly through problems and difficult situations facing me at the moment), there was a particular morning when I was feeling incredibly besieged by sadness. And at the height of my experiencing this insurmountable sense of hopelessness—seeming to have ravaged my entire being—instantly and out of nowhere, she came swooping down right over my head with the most distinct and elongated *kee-eeeeeeee* that had ever emerged from her throat (at least, while I happened to be present to witness such things). Consequently, as soon as this transpired I immediately did a double-take, looking upward in her direction with inquisitive, blinking eyes. In fact, I couldn't help myself but to continue involuntarily this rapid eye-shuttering reflex multiple times in succession.

But before describing this particular incident any further, it might be helpful first to expand upon what was actually going on in my life then. Earlier that morning, I kept waking up out of an inordinately light drowse, one which was unusually restless. Yet, once I gave up trying to fall back asleep and started instead to focus on my activities for the day, I soon realized how utterly depressed I had become since tucking myself into bed the night before.

At present, nothing seemed to soften the sharp-edged sorrow that was continually stabbing at my heart. No prayer nor exercise nor chores nor affirmations nor meditation nor deep breathing nor even a walk in the woods had the capacity to soothe either my sentiments or my thoughts. Nothing lightened the darkness devouring me that day.

Certainly, during these more recent years of my life, it might be thought of that such a particular point in time was witness to both my mind and emotions collapsing into total eclipse. Only a few other instances over the course of many decades did I ever face a moment so devoid of light.

Alas, to describe my condition then most vividly, it could warrant mentioning the words of Saint John of the Cross from centuries past. Although his intention for those words were somewhat different from how I would color them to depict this particular situation, they nevertheless seemed apt to describe my condition on such a bleak morning. Indeed, I was perchance passing through my own veritable:

Dark night of the soul…[51]

After all, the situation I woke up to every day appeared as being utterly hopeless. I was running out of food again. For weeks, I had been subsisting daily on a single meal of brown rice. One day I might have rice with soy sauce; the next would be a meal of rice and onions. When the onions were gone, I substituted them with onion flakes; then I had to resort to rice with curry and honey. After that, my pot of rice may have been enhanced by a bit of garlic powder, chili, ginger, or anything else that existed on my ever-dwindling spice shelf.

BoI knew absolutely no one in the area. Since there weren't any telephone cables or electric lines running up the road past my driveway, I couldn't have a phone installed even if the money to pay for one actually existed in my bank account at the time. Neither was there a strong enough signal for any cell phone service to be of practical use.

As a result, the only way possible to call anyone was by biking a twenty-mile roundtrip to the nearest pay phone—which oftentimes proved to be a fruitless enterprise when those I happened to be calling were frequently not around to pick up. For quite some time, my only regular mode of transportation was a mountain bike that my friend who owned the cabin lent to me. Since the gas tank for my car tended to be nearly empty on a regular basis, that bicycle frequently became my only lifeline to the outside world, despite the fact that it was terribly undersized for my exceptionally long legs, highly uncomfortable and somewhat unstable to ride, and designed for off-road travel. (Its gear ratio was much too low for traveling on roads between the cabin and neighboring villages.) But despite all of its obvious limitations, it was still an actual mode of transportation nonetheless—and I was deeply grateful for that.

I did have a couple of fairly distant neighbors but soon found that many people in the vicinity seemed to be suspicious of strangers and not very welcoming—even when they were feigning to be friendly with an unknown entity like me. And finally, because of my serious health

---

[51] Saint John of the Cross was a Spanish priest and Carmelite friar of the sixteenth century (1542–1591). As a poet and mystic, John of the Cross became well-known for his writings. One of his poems—although he personally never gave it a title—was referred to as "The Dark Night of the Soul". He also wrote a treatise on that poem that was simply entitled "The Dark Night".

According to *Wikipedia*, the poem was written:

> …in 8 stanzas of 5 lines each… [and] narrates the journey of the soul to mystical union with God.

Although John never intended these words to imply any kind of suffering (even though it has been widely quoted with the intention to express times of deep despair), he only meant the dark night to signify that which is unknown and unknowable. However, in my own experience mentioned above, it is true that I use the phrase to express my own despair at the time. Nevertheless, by the end of that incident, it is also possible to see the poet's actual intention for these words being applied to this particular situation as well.

condition, it was impossible for me to consider working at a local convenience store or the like, even on a part-time basis. Neither was I entitled to receive any assistance from the state, because the peculiar logistics of my situation denied me eligibility for several years.

As we return to the story about my daily visits with the hawk (most notably on the morning when she flew right over my head), it also must be mentioned that she then unexpectedly landed in the driveway only thirty feet from where I was standing on the deck. Never before had a hawk ever stood in the middle of the driveway like that—at least, not to my knowledge. Furthermore, neither during the entirety of my life had I ever witnessed such a stunt performed anywhere else either.

Certainly, there have been several occasions when one or more of those fearless hunters of the sky perched in the utmost branches of nearby trees. But this incident was entirely one-of-a-kind. No hawk has ever come so close to the cabin, nor have I ever seen any of them light upon such exposed, uncamouflaged, and wide-open ground before then.

After my quietly retreating from the deck back into the house, with equal stealth I opened the front door to get a better look at what she was currently about. But surprisingly, instead of flying further afield as every other bird normally would have done after detecting me being so close at hand, this great, winged presence kept turning her head towards me and began to cry out with mournfulness that I never heard from any such bird until that precise moment in time.

For several minutes, she kept darting a set of wild eyes in my direction and virtually wailed out in relentless successions. At first, I even asked myself if she could possibly be injured. But the moment when I considered this as a possibility, a flurry of wings and feathers fluttered furiously just before transporting her buteo-bodied semblance several feet further down the driveway. Once having landed on the ground again, this fierce and feathered marvel gazed upon me from across the meadow while letting loose still another plaintive cry—equally pronounced, pleading, and prolonged.

Such unorthodox behavior from an otherwise-reclusive bird of prey totally bewildered me; and while my mind was running through possible explanations for why this peculiar situation showed itself so readily, a simple answer disguised as a question came to the forefront of all my thoughts:

Does she actually want me to follow her?

The moment I suggested this as a likelihood, she raised her wings and flew along the driveway

fifty feet more only to land decidedly in the same fashion as before. Taking this seemingly calculated demonstration as a further and more decisive answer to my question, I lightly tiptoed down the front steps without further hesitation. It was then that resolve overtook any remaining reticence I might have had; and suddenly, I found myself committed to following her wherever she might be headed that day.

As we proceeded down the narrow lane from the cabin, the following things occurred several times in succession: first she would look back at me, call out decisively, fly several dozen feet further before landing again, and then cry out once more while waiting for me to catch up. Once she got to the driveway's end, her direction suddenly changed in midflight as she made a sharp left turn up the adjoining road that would take us deeper into the wilderness.

Soon after she flew unexpectedly around the corner so as to remove herself from plain sight, I wondered whether or not she had finally decided to leave the area altogether. But her sudden change of course also piqued my curiosity, so I rushed down the remaining stretch of driveway and turned onto the westbound road where she had sailed away only moments earlier. Much to my delight, her untamed countenance was still there for all to see—gazing back in my direction once more. She appeared to be resting amid the roughly packed and rutted tire tracks while patiently awaiting my anticipated arrival.

Inevitably, as soon as she saw me again her cry rang out, and she flew ahead predictably yet another fifty feet or so. The uncanny routine continued to be upheld without pause primarily because, during our procession up that isolated roadway, not a single car interrupted our predestined choreography in which we were both engaged. This remained true even while the cryptic dance continued for well over a quarter mile![52]

Once we approached another bend in the road, rumblings from a nearby mountain brook began to rise louder and louder. Just before reaching the culvert that directed those turbulent currents under the roadbed from one side to the other, my hawkish guide unexpectedly rose up yet again. But rather than persisting on this dirt and gravel track as we had been doing (presumably) for more than thirty minutes, she altered course once again and began to follow the cascading brook downstream.

Despite her second disappearance from view, she nevertheless did what she had done

[52] Long after I first estimated the distance of this amazing little journey with my hawk friend (and even after writing about it in the aforementioned paragraphs), I eventually decided to verify the actual mileage with an odometer and found my earlier estimation to be only slightly less than the clocked reading—which turned out to be just under three-tenths of a mile!

previously after making the first turn out of the driveway. My exceptional guide waited faithfully for me in the middle of what turned out to be a fairly indistinct trail—one which descended into the hidden ravine beneath us. After I followed her for a few minutes along this overgrown walkway, she abruptly took flight once more. But instead of continuing to follow the downhill slope of the path, her flapping, outstretched wings took that bird directly upward instead.

Momentarily, I came to the sad conclusion that she had tired of our time together and was finally vacating the premises once and for all. However, this boisterous surge of wing-power simply propelled her feathered body several yards higher to an elevated branch—one which protruded outward beyond the massive trunk of an ancient fir tree. From there, she could oversee the entire dense domain surrounding us.

Much to my astonishment, she didn't choose this preeminent bough simply as a random perch for reconnaissance purposes, but her sudden ascent brought the great bird back home to an impressively sizeable nest. If she had continued to stay close to the ground (as she had been doing since we left the cabin together), her formidable forest penthouse would have remained a well-kept secret.

However, because she chose to rise and then land so blatantly within the walls of this isolated aery, and did so in the presence of an outsider, all of these unorthodox actions appeared to have been done with the most purposeful of intentions on her part; and once she sank down into the familiar comfort of her suspended, airborne residence, a pair of gleaming eyes refocused their gaze upon my earthbound presence. Then, in an ultimate outburst, the most vibrant *kee-eeeeeeee* ever emanating from those brutally beaked lips exploded upon an unsuspecting atmosphere. Indeed, not only did this vocal eruption infringe upon every fiber of the air itself, but her rapturous cry completely shattered each of my bodily senses as well.

What a symphonic outpouring! It was more ecstatic than when she spoke out so atypically at the cabin before ever bringing me here to her sacred nest. Distinctly birdlike ultrasonic utterances rose above even the unrelentingly ubiquitous thunder of those resident cascades. That evocative moment flew piercingly through the soul of the earth as crystal-clear fluids gushed past our proximity both on-trail and in hemlock tree. Nothing other than this mother hawk's triumphal cry could surpass the audio-intensity of waters dancing, darting, and diving uproariously into the basin below. It was during this instant that the words of the poet Hafiz[53]

[53] Khwāja Shams-ud-Dīn Muhammad Hāfez-e Shīrāzī (1315–1390) has been recognized throughout the centuries by his pen name Hafez or Hafiz. He was considered to be one of the great Persian poets of all times. Also known as a Sufi master, throughout the centuries he has been referred to as the "Tongue of the Invisible".

resonated through my mind:

I once asked a bird,
"How do you fly in this gravity of darkness?"
And she replied
"Love lifts me."

As this feathered saint sang her bright, silvery syllables upon amplified air, those lingering tones stole my breath away. In an instant, I realized that although such extraordinary outcries left me dumbstruck, they also did something even more remarkable than just filling me with an irresistible sense of amazement. They ultimately healed me of the all-consuming anguish imbedded within my thoughts, my emotions, and every iota of my physical body; and it was only a short time ago when misery was the all-consuming reality of my life. Aside from having commended to me the whereabouts of her most private domain (something that I have never known another bird to reveal, certainly not to any human), the wonder of our prolonged and intimate time together healed my heart in a way that nothing else seemed to be capable of eliciting at the time.

In view of what had just transpired with this unlikeliest of friends, I could do nothing other than pose the following questions to myself:

Who was this hawk? Considering what many native ancestors of the region believed, was this airborne visitor truly a messenger of the Great Spirit, a harbinger of God? Or, to pose the question through the lens of an inquisitive mind gardener, was she attempting to communicate the intentions and expressions of divine love to me—if only I would listen and follow her irresistible lead through forest woodlands to a dwelling of utter revelation?

Out of the countless days that she could have chosen to show me her nest, why did she do such a thing on that particular morning? Of the thousands of instances when this bird came to visit me, how did she select the singular moment that also happened to be my darkest hour living at the cabin?

Was it conscious knowing on her part or just a vague intuition, because no mother bird is inclined to guide strangers over long stretches of terrain with the sole purpose of revealing her nest to them? In any other instance, a nest full of chicks is a mother bird's most well-

guarded treasure.

Could she actually have been reading my thoughts, did she sense my overwhelming hurt and despair, or was she so filled with divine love that her inimitable response was activated reflexively? Were both the deep sufferings that I had been experiencing (before she guided me to her wilderness hideaway with her seeming light-filled response to my suffering) and my subsequent healing—triggered by her seemingly conscious actions—merely the dual components necessary to fulfill those prophetic words uttered by the poet Rumi:[54]

The wound is the place where the Light enters you.

And finally, was the hopelessness totally removed from my heart simply because I chose to follow this unique bird to her home in a remote treetop? Was that the true reason for my extraordinary catharsis or perhaps was it due to still an even more enigmatic and undecipherable cause?

For those of us who would like to oversimplify the answer merely by stating that this had to be a coincidence or a meaningless fluke, I must insist otherwise. An arbitrary or chance encounter simply doesn't last for as prolonged a period as this occurrence most definitely did. If coincidences actually exist at all, they are fleeting moments that brush by us quickly. They do not linger on while profoundly affecting every aspect of our being over and over again.

As an example, the approximate time my lady-hawk and I spent together (from when she first flew directly over me at the cabin until I departed from her nesting area at the brook) encompassed no less than an hour. And during that extended time while we remained in intimate contact with one another, instead of her flying away when I was getting closer than most birds would normally allow, she instead beckoned me repeatedly in song to follow her before each time her corporal-self moved patiently forward.

This persistent and apparently deliberate strategy permitted me to continue trailing the bird down my lengthy driveway, along an extensive stretch of dirt road, and then onto a sparsely traveled path traveling through the middle of dense woodland. Aside from waiting for me to

[54] Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī (1207–1273), more commonly known simply as *Rumi*, was a Persian poet and Sufi mystic of the thirteenth century. According to *Wikipedia*:

> His poems have been widely translated into many of the world's languages and transposed into various formats. Rumi has been described as the "most popular poet" and the "bestselling poet" in the United States.

catch up more than twenty times, she then brought me to her nest. Such an action is something in *avian society* that normally would be an inconceivable choice—or practice—for any bird to make.

So rather than thinking of this situation over-simplistically as mere chance, I maintain that these non-verbal exchanges instead were measured, ongoing communications. They defied our usual justifications for rationalizing any state of affairs we simply don't want to admit has actually happened. Only human arrogance (in which duality definitely plays a role) would reject the idea of another species having the capability of interacting with us in such a profound manner while insistently denying every situation that continues exceeding our own capacity to understand.

This may be at least partially due to the fact that a majority of our human race, especially those who happen to be the urban and suburban dwellers among us, are totally out of touch with most types of wild animals in the first place. Many of our kind simply lack practice when it comes to the discernment of—or belief in—the possibilities of engaging and conversing with any species other than our own. The only possible exception is when some of us *chat* with house pets, those beloved beings who are definitely members of other species, but usually not of the undomesticated varieties.

However, even with our so-called *tamed* animals, this type of *chatting* tends to be fairly random and inconsequential. It almost always occurs without utilizing any precise methodology needed for teaching and learning more sophisticated ways to communicate, regardless of species. Our untutored efforts to converse with animals almost always yield inconsistent and incomplete results—thereby being presumably incorrect and ultimately unconscious as well.

When we fail to recall the *Four Cs* discussed in earlier chapters, so as not to discover a way of actually practicing how to converse *consciously*, *consistently*, *correctly*, and *completely*, our attempts to cross all boundaries into the cognitive domains of other creatures are akin to dialoguing among our human selves using nothing more than random and primitive *baby talk*. Equally, any such meaningless efforts also might bear a resemblance to when we yell out orders and reprimands without ever knowing or expecting that the recipients of those verbal assaults might possibly be able to respond to our mindlessness with genuine comprehension and compassion.

These types of unconscious attempts to interact supposedly could also be likened to when we casually convey spoken words without any true purpose for doing so in the first place—other

than simply feeling the urge to speak! How can anyone (human or otherwise) truly attain reliable results when we practice treating our interactions so arbitrarily, utilizing only the most unsophisticated, ineffective, and meaningless of approaches?

Due to the widespread misconception that significant communication between other species and our own is (at best) a fanciful idea based solely upon wishful thinking—or condemned instead as being an absolute impossibility, with no real indications of actually working in any practical or consistent manner—most people refuse to make even the slightest attempt at speaking with animals because we are already predisposed to the belief that it is a ludicrous assertion in the first place.

Consequently, such attitudes tend to create a self-fulfilling prophesy, making it virtually impossible for any meaningful exchanges to manifest. We further this inability by failing to practice and subsequently develop skills of perception and patience needed for any significant interactions to occur. Therefore, our self-imposed, cognitive deficits prevent us from recognizing accordingly when other creatures are essentially *speaking* to us in a variety of ways, even while we are naïvely supposing their inability to do so.

Whenever we actually do practice noticing and responding when other creatures are presumably *saying something*, there is an immeasurable magnitude of wonder and awe that becomes immediately apparent and accessible. Regardless, such a transcendent state of being is highly unlikely when we adhere to the dull-witted routines of ignoring, reacting fearfully or aggressively, or behaving in a careless and unwise fashion.[55]

That being said, there are miraculous outcomes that can and do occur once we have overcome our dualistic inhibitions and reluctances to dialogue with those outside of our own human community. So, after we transcend the barrier-forming prejudices and preconceived notions blocking our abilities to perceive correctly (even if only for a split second), indescribable experiences of interconnectedness actually turn out to be quite likely.[56]

---

[55] There is one part of this statement that needs to be further clarified. When I spoke of not *reacting fearfully*, it does not mean for us immediately to muster up our courage and approach wild animals without having any behavioral knowledge or understanding about them (or experience actually communicating with them before, even when having done so from a distance). To run head-on and attempt petting a grizzly bear simply to prove that we have overcome our fear of doing so is as foolish and naïve as jumping off the top of a hundred-story building simply to demonstrate that our fear of heights has been overcome.

[56] Although I am a strong advocate of interacting with all creatures, there is still the need for caution (in the guise of mindfulness) when doing so. Think of how we pass countless people while proceeding down a busy sidewalk. There are always those with whom making eye contact seems appropriate or even beneficially inescapable. Furthermore, there are those who might possibly inspire us to smile at them, and the occasional strangers who feel so familiar to us that we are instantly compelled to stop and have a meaningful visit with them. But it also is true that a good number of those whom

Such potentials are inexorably linked to our becoming conscious of the divine oneness existing in everyone and everything around us. As we open ourselves to the habit of creating weed-less, unmitigated, paradisial conditions through each of our actions and interactions (and by implementing unending displays of—and nurturing the belief in—boundless compassion), we eventually will perceive that there indeed is a unifying current of divine love surrounding us that joins together all humans, animals, vegetation, droplets of ocean, grains of sand, chips of rock and earth, clouds and suns and stars in the sky, and everything else within a single, sacred bond.

An image of this ever-present amalgamation became vividly apparent to me when my lady-hawk was trying to get my attention with persistent overtures and gesturing. But despite her firm insistences, if I hadn't rounded up enough courage and curiosity to join with her in the end, I would have never experienced the inevitable catharsis towards which she was prepared to guide me. Little did I know how our seemingly insignificant pilgrimage together could transform the deepest of my sorrows into a blossoming of rapturous joy.

The blessedness of those interactions (a simple acquiescence between this unsuspecting human and another animal life-form) revealed an all-pervasive oneness to me—something transcending our limited existence beyond the dualistic boundaries between our seemingly isolated species and all others. It likewise can teach each of us how to overcome our disaffecting fears, prejudices, differences, and any other well-practiced constraints and partitions we have developed with other individuals (and groups) existing expressly within our own human community.

My particular interactions with the hawk clearly indicate that when any spoken or silent voice of an animal murmurs messages into our physical ears (or into the more subtle *ears* of our minds), then all we have to do to receive the lasting benefits of said whisperings is to accept them as seeds of love—which they truly are when we choose to believe in them as such—and allow those seeds to sink within the soil of that belief. As aspiring gardeners, we thenceforth should tend to each of these morsels of compassion diligently (immediately practicing our belief

---

we meet in passing incite within us a response to avoid direct contact altogether, where keeping our eyes focused directly ahead of us seems to be the most sensible course of action that we might take at the time.

It would be practical to treat our encounters with wild animals in the same way as well, at least in the beginning. There will be those we come across that might deserve direct eye contact—or at least the occasional glance. Others will move us to smile or spout off a spontaneous word of recognition. Yet it often is wise to just leave them alone and go about our own business. But at unique moments, a deeper communication is not only likely but is warranted between us. Only practice and discernment can teach us when such an interaction is beneficial and wise.

in them through offering equally compassionate responses in return), allowing such animal utterances to grow while they continually open and touch our veritable ears, our intellects, our emotions, and even the fertility of our elusive and hidden hearts, so that we in turn may further actuate and grow these perceptions of love. And as a result, we will also be able to accept the subtle, unanticipated mercies offered by the most improbable of creatures hitherto alien and seemingly arbitrary to ourselves.

Therefore—as I have clearly stated before—my conversations with the dearest of hawks can no longer be perceived as an accidental fluke. Her time with me certainly was much more meaningful than mere happenstance. Accordingly, in each of our individual and collective lives as human beings, once we begin searching diligently for an ultimate love that encompasses the entirety of the mind garden and how it actually fills every nanosecond of our breathing moments here on earth, we will eventually realize this love and perceive its existence in everything.

Moreover, we will do so even when it manifests as an inconceivable intention offered by the unlikeliest of messengers. This most definitely includes the interlude between my own hawkish compatriot and me. As we practice believing in divine love—and living as its tangible vessels without bounds—indescribably fruitful blossoms of compassion, mercy, physical healing, spiritual conversion, and a quintessential joy will burst forth within and all around us as the truly wondrous conversions of our lives.

In my own experience and while observing the experiences of others, I often have noticed that those blossoms are inclined to appear at our most crucial moments when the dualistic tides of life are shifting or about to shift. Consequently, we often consider such transformational happenings as unexpected good fortune, an inexplicable freak occurrence, or simply the miracle we have been praying for so fervently. But these sorts of events frequently transpire because, when we are at our lowest points, we have more of an inclination to let go of the dichotomous weeds that we have been imitating and clinging to throughout our corporeal existence—something we ostensibly have practiced much more than any belief in and actions pertaining to the genuine offshoots of compassion.

It is not necessarily accurate to say that love's miracles do not show themselves except when manifesting in the most tragic of circumstances; but oftentimes during our catastrophes or any supremely dire moment—for each of us who are embedded in the ongoing practices of duality—we find it easier to let go of our duplicities when circumstances rip them out of our clenched fists and clinging, illusory beliefs. In the relinquishing of our dualistic struggles, we

suddenly can become aware of an all-pervasive wonder revealed solely by dwelling in oneness, balance, and divine love. And in the instance of this particular story, it just so happened to be a winged wonder who allowed this to materialize in my presence over and over again.[57]

With this in mind, it appears likely that my lady-hawk was truly one of those prescribed messengers of the Great Spirit (the regional persona of Christ, Allah, Yaweh, or Krishna familiar to those indigenous folk who lived here throughout the ages). After all, it was my local medicine man, Little Wolf,[58] who spoke to me of hawks being the messenger of the Great Spirit as he also told me how hummingbirds were the spirit of joy in the same conversation.

So, in the case of my lady-hawk's inviting me to her nest above the ravine, she indeed could have been a true messenger of the divine. After all, she remained in my company during one of the most isolated and uncertain periods of my life, and *spoke* to me at the precise moment when everything appeared to be at its bleakest. The essence of her sacred message to me could be none other than letting go of despair so that the miracles of wonder and mercy could penetrate and heal my crumbling heart once again.

Furthermore, if we are to perceive her as being a veritable voice of divine love (or a symbolic archetype thereof), it seems logical that rather than communicating solely in the words

---

[57] In upcoming chapters, more will be discussed about this topic. Letting go and learning how to surrender all the weedy dualities to which we cling are essential for manifesting the truest hopes of our heart. Whether it happens when being lifted out of an extreme hardship or tragedy—or working diligently to fulfill our most cherished dreams—a beneficial outcome is unlikely to occur unless some sort of surrender unfolds beforehand.

[58] I am no longer certain whether or not I am remembering this extraordinary recluse's name correctly. However, Little Wolf seems to me now what he actually did call himself, so this is how I will refer to him throughout the upcoming chapters in this book.

I first met him on an August afternoon in the late 1970s. While I was hiking up the Baker River (just below Mount Mouselauke), I spotted an unusual man panning for gold. He sensed my presence even in the same instant when I first noticed him and immediately turned around to wave at me vigorously, despite the fact that he was more than fifty yards away. With a broad smile on his face, he beckoned me over to him.

Just finishing up with his panning for the day, Little Wolf was starting to pack up his gear. Once he finished doing that, we both sat down on a large slab of granite facing a series of cascades, and he immediately began describing to me about his mystical life as a tribal medicine man. Our conversation lasted for hours and we didn't part company until well after dusk.

A week later, when I happened to be visiting an elderly couple in a neighboring village, the husband brought up the story about this medicine man living on the Baker River. Our conversation pleasantly reminded me of my encounter with him just a week before. As soon as they found out I had already met him, the couple were the first people who told me his name. Encouraging me to visit with him again, they promptly gave me directions to where he lived, because no one could phone him in advance. He had neither electricity nor telephone.

So the next day, I biked several miles down from where I was living on Ore Hill to discover his one-room shanty with the river only a few hundred feet away from his front door. We then spent the entire day talking about healing, tribal history, and nature. And over the next few years, I managed to visit him several more times—even after I soon had to move away from the area. Sadly, on my last trip to his cabin, I found out from someone who lived nearby that he had recently passed away.

This tough old shaman was humorous, kind, and brimming with insights. Although the paths of our lives crossed only briefly, I still felt that we had known each other forever.

of humans, her message needed to be expressed through the actions of compassion and displays of the sublimely wondrous. She most definitely shared with me a vital message during her prolonged demonstration of divulging to me something both exceptionally compassionate and filled with rapture. Moreover, her timing of doing so happened to coincide with the precise moment when I needed such a *message* perhaps more than at any other time.

We must observe and participate in these experiential communications with our physical eyes, envision them within our mind's eye, sense their presence with our bodily skin, feel their intentions with our more elusive hearts, and listen to their voices with both fleshly ears on either side of our heads and through the metaphysical auricles that are buried deep within us—those sensory mechanisms designed for listening beyond that which is listenable. As we accomplish practicing each of these acts of receptivity, acceptance, and love, we will thereby allow all unanticipated interactions with every cognizant creature (seemingly separate and disconnected from our own species) to grow and manifest into the inspiring, transformational phenomena that can and will reconcile our lives.[59]

IX.

A curious proposal...

At the beginning of Alex's life, much of his earlier learning came through constant repetition of brief verbal commands, usually consisting of one, two, or three words. My requests

[59] There is an interesting sidebar to the ending of this story. Like so many other times when I have interacted with wild animals at moments of crisis in my life, in almost every case some sort of significant and propitious turn of events would follow within a day or two of each incident. Again, these outcomes were so out of the ordinary (yet happening too many times over the years) to be merely chance.

On the following day after my visit with this hawk took place, a friend came up the driveway out of the blue. It was the first time I saw another human being in more than ten weeks. Needless to say, his arrival was a welcome relief. He kindly took me shopping so my food shelves were replenished, the gas tank of my car was refilled, and numerous other kindnesses were offered in that moment of total deprivation. Again, as with countless similar incidents, the mysterious wonder of this exceptional interaction was followed almost immediately by an unanticipated and beneficial shift in my life.

never burdened him with additional words until I was certain that he had mastered those simple ones first. As soon as he demonstrated an ability to carry out each directive in a correct and consistent fashion, then I would begin *linking* two or more of those familiar commands together while continuing to introduce unfamiliar ones usually containing no more than a couple of words at a time.

After months of daily practice, I noticed that he not only acquired each of those new commands that we practiced together—allowing his vocabulary to increase—but he also seemed to be acquiring a comprehension for various words and phrases on his own. By the time he was five years old, he could even carry out instructions that were given to him in a series of several consecutive sentences.

As he grew older, his ability for learning went way beyond just learning specific words and responding to various verbal suggestions. After living with him for ten years or so, I started noticing other extraordinary cognitive transformations. As I mentioned before, one of them began after he would continuously sit in an adjoining room very patiently, every time I happened to be meditating. Thereafter, he exhibited a consistent and considerable increase of awareness in many regards. Only after spending time in this manner did he appear to acquire an ability to perceive manifestations and visitations that normally come to human practitioners, and (usually) only after extensive training.

His disposition continued to develop and mature throughout his entire lifetime. I regularly insisted upon gentler alternatives to his initially wild, excessively excitable, and physically forceful interactions with young children, the elderly, and various smaller animals.

Also, his sensitivity to music (and to many other things) increased steadily for over one and a half decades while we practiced regularly together. Not only did he learn and interact as a dog, but years of constant training on one level or another also seemed to expand his abilities to communicate and interact with his human friends in a more sophisticated and *humanlike* manner.

However, for many years I couldn't find a way to prevent him from running off down the road to three nearby houses. Each place had special allures for him such as other dogs to visit, children to play with, and an assortment of tasty treats frequently offered by kids and adults alike. But getting to each of those locations had very real dangers. The foremost hazard was when speeding cars and trucks came barreling down our steep, mountain roadway from a state park situated only a couple of miles further up.

I tried countless approaches to curb his desire for sneaking off whenever he had the opportunity. Nothing ever seemed to work until after discussing the situation with a former student who also happened to be a well-respected psychiatrist. He had observed and commented on Alex's exceptional aptitude for learning and his remarkable ability to comprehend what people were saying. So eventually my friend made this astonishing suggestion:

> Why don't you try speaking with him just like you would with anyone else? Describe the situation in full detail, including how dangerous it is for him to sneak off on his own. Don't assume that he can't understand you. Instead, think of this in the same way you do when showing your students how they can approach technical or creative issues more effectively, even though you know that they might not get everything you're saying all at once. Indeed, you know from experience that eventually they do figure these things out—often more quickly than expected.
>
> So when it comes to Alex, lay your cards out on the table for him. After all, he's very smart (as we both know). Simply be patient. And see what happens!

Although, in one respect I was quite surprised (yet delighted) by this pragmatic individual making such a proposal—one which definitely could have been seen by many as being totally *unpragmatic*. Yet, his recommendation reminded me of numerous accounts that I had read about several years earlier, when certain researchers and trainers got amazing responses from animals simply by speaking to them as if they were other human beings who understood what they were talking about in the first place.

Such situations might actually be considered as being similar to when human parents regularly use coherent speech with their toddlers instead of resorting to the typical *baby talk* many of us often inflict upon our young early on. In both the human instances and the examples dealing with various types of animals (both domestic and wild), all of them being spoken to intelligibly and intelligently tended to grasp things considerably more quickly and fully than those who instead were treated as though they didn't have any ability for true comprehension at all.

Undeniably, the prospect of communicating directly with members of other species wasn't an idea even remotely foreign to me when my psychiatrist friend gave me his intriguing piece

of advice. In fact, there were many situations throughout my own life where I had already *spoken* successfully with a wide variety of wild animals. It just never occurred to me to attempt speaking with Alex in explicit detail before my friend reminded me that this indeed was another option.

X.

Attaining canine consciousness...

Once having agreed to try out my psychiatrist-friend's suggestion by *expressing* my concerns to Alex directly, I quietly called him over to lie down next to me so I could explain why he shouldn't run off down the road by himself. At first, it seemed best to talk about one particular house where he almost always went. After all, it was the closest place to ours, just a few hundred yards across the street, and he could rocket over there in a frenetic flash (as was his tendency) with little or no regard to what may or may not be dashing down the road at any given moment.

So, it was imperative for me to spell out all of the hazards he might face while crossing our street without me. I pointed out that when he twice freed himself (from his lengthy, fifty-foot lead on the front lawn), a couple of speeding cars barely missed hitting him head on as he was carelessly sniffing about in the middle of the roadway—totally oblivious to the imminent danger quickly descending upon the place where he happened to be loitering.

Long before ever considering to have such an in-depth *doggie discussion* with him, I often wondered why I had never been successful in teaching my canine friend to have more *street sense* over the years. After all, Alex usually responded very well to being trained in almost every other respect. Despite that, he never quite got the hang of how precarious stepping out in front of traffic could be whenever we remained at home in our quiet countryside setting.

In contrast, once we began visiting busier locations such as Boston and the greater New

York area together (even while he was still a puppy), the unfamiliar environment made it easier to establish in him a much deeper and constant respect for the dangers found on busy streets. This was mostly due to the fact that his training around cars in urban areas was also very extensive and consistent each time we ventured out-of-doors. Such practice sessions were something that we usually spent a fair amount of time doing every day while we were staying in any hectic, urban environment.

Even during his occasional stretches off-leash—which tended to be deliberately brief—I was always close at hand in case it was necessary to restrain him for any reason. The constant attention I gave him in these unfamiliar circumstances unquestionably arose out of necessity. But there also happened to be an immediate and positive result from our consistent *street practice* together. He quickly became constantly alert to the ongoing and unanticipated hazards awaiting us at any moment.

It eventually become apparent to me that one of the main causes for the stark difference between how he behaved so much more cautiously on city streets than his almost carefree attitude towards any moving vehicles at home was definitely due to distinctly dissimilar habits he regularly practiced in each setting. Whenever we were visiting more metropolitan environments together, I worked diligently with him on how to respect and navigate cars rushing by us.

But in comparison, his less-attentive attitude at home was mainly due to the patterns he developed and maintained over the course of his earlier life on the farm. I never needed to pay any attention to them because when we lived there, his friendly greetings to new arrivals—while he always positioned himself directly in front of most oncoming cars—never caused a danger to anyone. On the contrary, all of our visitors thoroughly enjoyed how he came out to greet them as the self-appointed welcoming committee.

However, after moving to our house on the mountain road, a possibility of dire consequences (due to his continuing a now-inappropriate behavior) became a constant threat to his wellbeing. But because his habit of running out in front of cars to meet those coming to see us was so well-ingrained, I found this particular behavior virtually impossible to alter, even when our situation had finally made it essential to do so.

Admittedly, for those first several years of his life, our home happened to be deep within the borders of that two-hundred-acre farm where every car approaching the yard always slowed down and stopped. This either happened directly in front of our cottage or nearer to the

neighbor's big farmhouse next door.

Unfortunately, all approaching vehicles signified to him that people were coming to visit; and as he truly loved company, Alex got into the practice of going out into the middle of the cul-de-sac where he would wait patiently for car doors to be flung open immediately in front of him. Once anyone began to step out of a car or truck, or simply dismounting from the seat of a motorcycle, he understood it as a signal for him to rush forward as a gesture of friendly greeting. He always performed this *farmland welcome* with his jubilant tail flailing in full throttle. Alex always took it upon himself in being the first one to receive any newcomers with his affably canine greetings to whomever ventured this far up our *less-traveled* lane.

Since he systematically stayed a safe distance from every approaching car until it stopped completely, his habit of standing amicably in the middle of the road was considered a well-appreciated touch of hospitality by all who came to visit. But as I said before, once we moved to a place where speeding cars almost never were going to stop in front of him, it immediately became alarming whenever he went out on the road awaiting the appearance of someone fast approaching from either direction.

So, when I finally got around to actually talk with him in detail about all of the reasons why it was important for him not to venture off to that one particular neighbor's house, his response was simply to watch me intently throughout my entire explanation. In fact, he didn't move a muscle. His body remained so still that if it were not for an occasional rise of his chest from breathing, I might have mistaken him for a statue.

However, once we finished our quiet *conversation* together, he never again visited that house. This held true for the next several years until the end of his life.

Although he never crossed the road to drop in on those particular neighbors anymore, he started venturing further down the road to the other two places instead—the ones I didn't talk about with him earlier. In fact, the frequency of his jaunts to these other houses suddenly increased. This was especially true with the one neighbor who had a small dog who he especially liked.

Consequently, the escapes from his lead became more and more of a regular habit. He had discovered several ingenious ways of freeing himself, so it became an imperative to *talk* with him once again. But when I actually did speak to him another time, he listened to me as before and never went back to the second house with the little dog after that. However, knowing full well the results of our first discussion, I shouldn't have been surprised at all when he stopped

visiting the second house as well.

There was only one neighbor remaining to where he would still venture off. Yet, just a few weeks after that second discussion, we had one final *chat*; and from that day forward he never sneaked away from our house again—anywhere. This might be considered just another coincidence by some. But until that final, *one-sided* dialogue I had with him, his habitual flights to those three nearby houses never ceased and endured steadily for many years.

Did he actually understand the content of those extensive and intricate explanations? Some disbelievers might scoff at such a proposition. However, his reactions were too precise to be merely flukes. It definitely is true that he had proven over time that he was capable of responding appropriately to multiple commands conveyed in successive, lengthy sentences.

Given that for years I tried countless approaches to curb his constant habit of running off, it seems ludicrous to assume that each of these three outcomes occurred simply by chance. There certainly were numerous other accounts illustrating Alex's ever-improving, seemingly conscious abilities that continued to develop even up to the remaining few days before his death.

But now, before concluding this saga about Alex's life, about his tireless exuberance, gentleness, and joy; about his willingness to endure repetitive practices, his apparent eagerness for learning through imitation; and about his apparent development to making conscious decisions on his own, I would first like to convey one final story:

In the mid-1990s, a friend accompanied Alex and me on a hike along the Franconia Ridge. This always has been a favorite trek of mine, and although I always loved venturing up there solo, I also enjoyed sharing the experience with anyone who was willing to make the ascent with me. While trudging up to the ridge via Falling Waters Trail, we passed by gorge brooks, an endless succession of cascades, three stunning waterfalls, and—in the uppermost portion of the track—a truly sheer and massive rock face that shone across an extensive and narrow pass, comprising the central portion of Franconia Notch.[60] [61]

[60] The name of this enormous cliff remains to this day, Shining Face Rock. When any moisture runs down its impressive façade on a clear day, any direct sunlight will make it glitter and shine like an exceptional jewel that can be admired close at hand or even from afar.

[61] Sometime after our hike took place, the trail was eventually redirected away from this massive rock face. In latter years, a park ranger once told me that the reason for creating an alternative route away from the cliff was simply because so many people were having accidents or getting lost in that vicinity and the diverted portion of the trail appeared to be much safer, shorter, and easier to follow. This turned out to be especially beneficial for the inexperienced hikers and tourists who so frequently ventured up the path with no understanding or appreciation of how potentially hazardous things could get there.

A three-mile climb finally brought us to the top of Little Haystack Mountain. After stopping for a prolonged repose at its summit to relish the magnificent views surrounding us on every side, our objective then was to head north on Franconia Ridge Trail and proceed towards the two highest peaks in that region: Mount Lincoln and Mount Lafayette.

For nearly three additional miles our path drifted across a narrow, spiny ridge. All the while, it continued to persist entirely above the timberline. Only sparse, fragile, dwarflike vegetation exists there, because of harsh weather conditions and the barren, rocky soil. As we surveyed this otherworldly landscape, we could see that the trail meandered before us in a serpentine manner for well over a mile. It stretched northward to where Mount Lincoln's craggy heights dominated the horizon.

Far below, there was a vast, pristine wilderness extending into the east, portions of ant-sized villages that were not hidden by the southern-most mountaintops on Franconia Ridge, and highly miniaturized vehicles mutely traveling along a thin, threadlike highway to the west of us through Franconia Notch itself.

Even though I had frequented this place regularly for decades, each time I found myself there, my reaction was always the same. That beguiling, obscure byway forever filled my senses with wonderment. I felt like the discoverer of a great and mysterious portal that beckoned me to enter into its vast, hidden wastelands in the sky.

Because we didn't commence hiking until just before lunchtime, it was already late afternoon by the time we left Little Haystack for Mount Lincoln. If I were traveling alone this wouldn't have been a concern. Whenever I hiked during that period of my life, I never felt the need to carry a light with me. For years, if my journey continued after darkness, I always tramped along successfully with no illumination. My night vision had become very acute and reliable.

However, because neither of us brought any form of artificial light, I didn't want to spoil my friend's adventure by exposing him for hours to a blind, silent trudge in total darkness. After all, he normally was accustomed to the bustle and bright lights of nights in the city. Therefore, I suggested that we turn back and head down the mountain within the next thirty minutes. We then could be certain to have ample daylight for the rest of our trip.

I explained that although there is always plenty of light above the timberline well after sunset, this definitely wouldn't be the case once we returned into dense forest. As soon as the sun begins to recede towards the horizon, even before sunset, darkness can consume

everything beneath any mountainous woodland canopy very quickly.

This might not have been an issue if we were hiking on level and relatively smooth terrain where he would be able to *feel* his way along the trail with few encumbrances. However, our journey back to the car included all sorts of potential risks: smooth, treadless boulders and steep, slimy rock slabs to maneuver; precarious ledges and narrow pathways hanging on the upper edges of ravines and deep gullies; long descents over unstable, broken rock and gravel; and countless other obstacles that normally do not constitute substantial threats or dangers when they can be seen in broad daylight.

Despite my numerous attempts to dissuade him from any further dalliance, he insisted that we remain on the ridge a while longer. After all, there might never be another opportunity for him to observe the sunset from such a unique vantage; and apparently, he truly trusted that I would bring him safely out of the forest—even through this intensely darkened landscape.

Undeniably, we were very much rewarded for having extended our stay at that altitude; because moments before twilight blossomed, the airborne display anticipated by both of us was decidedly more spectacular than usual. An entire firmament of vibrant, swirling, rainbow hues engulfed the earth, while a never-ending assortment of silky clouds floated overhead. These enormous puffs wafted weightlessly through pools of infinite color—a dynamic, celestial canvas which embraced the world from above.

Such a sight always seemed to me like a great gift from the sun to our world just before departing beyond the inevitable obscurity soon to follow. But while those extraordinary colors resonated within each of my eyes, I could also hear the words attributed to Hafiz simultaneously echoing through my mind—those vibrant words he purportedly had written down more than sixteen hundred years ago:

Even after all this time
The sun never says to the earth,

"You owe me."

Look what happens with a love like that,
It lights the whole sky.

After witnessing such an extraordinary event, the three of us continued to linger several minutes before departing. We then fell back silently into the dense wooded regions below where

most of our return trip was serene and uneventful. The moment we began to descend from the summit, Alex zoomed ahead of us, instantly vanishing into the night.

Once dusk had faded into darkness and darkness poured over the forest canopy, heavy layers of thick, blackened clouds absorbed any last remnants of light from that moonless sky. Not even a single star remained to furnish faint glimmers from above. In order to escort my friend through such obscurity, I had him hold onto an extra strap hanging from my backpack. After giving him a few tips on how to proceed, he quickly became totally receptive to all of my suggestions concerning our night passage down this ostensibly treacherous course. Consequently, he remained calm and content throughout the entirety of (what he previously believed to be) a daunting journey homeward.

After traveling more than three-quarters of the way back to the trailhead, our path gradually leveled off and became considerably smoother. At that point, my hiking companion cheerfully blurted out how amazing it had been for him to come down through such rough ground so easily and safely. He also exclaimed that his adventure in total darkness would never be believed by any of his family or friends. But just as he spoke those exuberant words of relief, we were about to run into a serious snag.

The next section of trail remained relatively flat for hundreds of yards. Yet, alongside its course, steep slopes fell sharply towards a narrow, mountain streambed below. Soon we would be required to turn abruptly from the path and maneuver our way down a dirt ramp. At the end of this embankment was a footbridge that stretched over brook and gulley. Our crossing would bring us to a small ledge on the opposite side.

That unusual bridge was fashioned from a single, sizable log. Its rounded, upper face had been planed-away to create a level surface for walking; and straight, slender limbs (in succession) were mounted as handrails.

Proceeding towards this bridge required us to lunge off the trail and take one large step downward onto the ramp. Not until we turned and faced the gulley could either ramp or bridge be detected from any viewpoint above. In broad daylight, this turnoff regularly was missed by hikers unfamiliar to the area. Even after a sign had been put up nearby, there were those who still kept going straight along an unmarked utility trail. Anyone following that alternate course would wander off in an entirely unanticipated and ultimately unwanted direction.

Locating the proper turnoff after dark required more concentration from me than at any other time during the hike. Attempting to veer towards the bridge prematurely or belatedly

probably would mean an immediate and brutal plunge into the gulley. If it were not for Alex's unexpected help, any added difficulties or impediments presenting themselves that night might have made finding the bridge a near-impossibility.

Normally, to locate the turnoff at night required me to lean carefully over the bank's edge. This was necessary to pinpoint a shimmering, soft radiance that manifested regularly above the ramp. I spent several years training myself in complete darkness to perceive the subtle illuminations surrounding almost any object. (This peculiar topic will be discussed further in the section of Chapter 7 entitled: *Curative quests ending night-blindness*.) A few people that I knew found such a feat to be implausible. Despite their incredulity, I successfully employed this technique for many years while hiking under the heavy veil of pitch blackness.

About thirty minutes before that intersection with the bridge path would come into view, we first came face-to-face unexpectedly with an intensely luminous glare. Apparently, a new beacon had been installed on the summit facing us, and its penetrating beams seemed to soak through every leaf and branch in the forest. When this insidious light first struck me, my night vision disappeared instantly and I became virtually blind.

My friend wondered why we were no longer moving at the steady pace that we had been following for some time. Reluctantly, I explained what had just happened. I didn't want to worry or upset him. If he became nervous and subsequently began to talk anxiously or react unexpectedly, it might impede our situation even further. Any added talking or reactions induced by worry or panic might interfere with my ability to concentrate.

I told him that if I couldn't find the turnoff in the next few minutes, I would crawl along the steep edge of the path until I felt the appropriate turn with my hands. This certainly could take hours to do this, but it would also prevent me from falling into the deep gulley.

But before I began searching any further, Alex appeared out of nowhere. He hadn't checked in with us for quite some time. The moment he materialized, his behavior was totally uncharacteristic for any hiking situation in which we had ever been together. Instead of greeting me head-on in his normal, robust fashion (waiting for my usual words of thanks as his signal to leave again), he silently appeared by my side and stood there without budging.

Then something happened that never occurred while we were in the woods before or since that time. He put his nose under my hand and flipped my entire arm into the air with great force. Immediately thereafter, he rushed ahead and stopped at a spot that was a few hundred feet ahead of us. Although I was no longer able to see the edges of the trail as I

normally could when the forest was completely dark, I now was able to distinguish only Alex's silhouette in the beam of light that emanated from above and behind him.

After waiting there for several, long moments, he rushed back to me and flipped my arm in the air another time. As before, he ran ahead to the same location and waited patiently. However, I was bemused by our predicament and still didn't realize that he was trying to tell me something. Again, he came back to me a third and fourth time after running ahead to that one particular point on the trail.

It was only following his fifth attempt when I decided to lead my friend to Alex's position on the path as quickly as I could and still manage it safely in that blinding light. Once we arrived there (with Alex patiently looking on) I immediately began searching for indications that this was indeed the place where we should turn to descend onto the ramp.

Much to my amazement and relief, it certainly was the turnoff for which we were searching. As soon as I began to jump off of the trail, Alex leapt ahead of me, tiptoed across the exceedingly narrow bridge, and good-naturedly awaited us on the other side. After managing to escort my friend safely over the creek, Alex stood there with his tail wagging enthusiastically in full throttle. The moment that we (his two human companions) scrambled away from the bridge, he shot off once more into the darkness ahead.

Thankfully, the rest of our hike was peaceful again, and Alex never came back to check on us after that. There were no more hazards before us. Perhaps he understood the situation far better than I did. About thirty minutes later we found him at the trailhead, amiably waiting by the car.

Before then, my friend never felt dogs were capable of intelligence. He remarked that they didn't have the capacity to demonstrate any form of conscious behavior. But after this incident, his view of dogs and other animals changed dramatically. Once we arrived at the parking lot, he ran over to Alex and uncharacteristically knelt down to hug him while lavishing our canine companion with high praise:

> You're my hero!
>
> You saved us!
>
> You are so smart!
>
> Such an amazing dog!

Alex simply wagged happily, gave him a big, slobbery kiss on the face (much to my friend's

displeasure), pulled back his lips as far as they would go, and smiled his classic smile.

After Alex died, I received letters and sympathy cards from several students—four adults and a young teenager. They were all filled with touching, good wishes, and I certainly was grateful for having received them. Amazingly, each one ended with the exact same words:

Alex was the kindest dog I ever met.

Before that moment, I never thought of him as being *kind*. Undeniably, he was a wonderful dog. Yet, I also knew we had practiced gentleness and many other constructive forms of modifying his instinctive canine conduct. Nevertheless, these observations from other people hit on something more profound, an insight that had escaped me until then. Did he actually master responses of gentleness to the point that they had evolved into a genuinely conscious kindness or even demonstrations of true compassion?

After mentally revisiting much of his life with me time and again, I recalled so many circumstances where he certainly expressed a veritable empathy towards others. When he was about to exhibit self-centered, predictably primitive, *animalistic* behavior, he displayed instead an unexpected and seemingly deliberate alternative.

There were innumerable situations when he definitely seemed to be aware of how to convey kindheartedness. His demeanor would immediately become softer and more subdued. He often stretched back his lips to show us that uncanny smile of his, but always at moments that would be considered to be *humanly* appropriate. More importantly, especially during his last several years on this earth, he reliably revealed these qualities without any prompting nor instruction from me—nor from anyone else.

It is true that during the first part of his life, I had to drill him on a daily basis. His interactions had to be corrected constantly with the use of specific countermands. Even when he started to adapt desirable changes, any provocations from other individuals nearby that reflected his more unruly behavior easily tempted him into reverting to his formerly wild and uncontrolled way of relating with those around him.

For example, if I were in the midst of practicing with Alex to be more gentle while a couple of neighborhood dogs just happened to be roughhousing within his line of sight, he predictably would imitate those old, instinctual behaviors almost immediately, even in circumstances where he already had begun to understand that a more gentle and considerate approach was essential. In his earliest stages of development, such disruptions literally

undermined all of our previous modifications altogether.

Without fail, his newly acquired conduct instantaneously would evaporate entirely. He almost always relapsed into his previous habits of mindless, reflexive reactions—those which always have been seen as a norm for canine behavior. But in actuality, uncontrolled, self-centered behavior is simply what occurs in many species (including human beings) when no conscious conditioning establishes more balanced responses and interactions that eventually might lead to a possible awakening into divine love.

In order for Alex to reclaim the hard-won improvements that we worked on so diligently together, it was vital to revive and strengthen all of his beneficial mannerisms with immediate retraining. It also was essential to select an environment where there would be no outside interferences or interruptions to sabotage the planned behavioral adjustments being practiced once more.

However, as we continuously *rehearsed* these changes year after year, an extraordinary transformation began to take place. As I just mentioned, in his younger life I would often have to help him adjust his reactions so he would consistently behave more suitably in any given situation. But, as he matured, these beneficial changes in conduct were strengthened even more when he nearly always could make the decision to alter his actions and attitudes by himself.

I almost never had to assist him to react gently whenever it was appropriate. He immediately would do so of his own accord. Even while there were other dogs behaving uncontrollably in close proximity, and even if he were tempted to join in with the excitement by imitating their horseplay, he instead would check himself and demonstrate an ability to remain calm and gentle. This is something that he could never do when he was younger.

Alex truly mastered resisting his instincts to carouse and jump upon people with an abandoned excitement. He instead discovered how to respond mildly and with quiet affection, especially in his interminglings with smaller children and the elderly.

He began sharing his dinners calmly and happily with other dogs despite the old, inbred canine urges to protect any potential foodstuff with the usual snapping, snarling, and biting. Additionally, he would invite those same doggie guests into his private little bedchamber—the kennel downstairs. This certainly isn't unlike human youngsters when they enthusiastically bring playmates into their own rooms for the very first time. Moreover, I fondly remember how Alex regularly poked me gently in the ribs until I laughed out loud whenever he found me sad or

exhausted and how he politely waited to be invited into the living room while I was in the middle of working at the piano.

These are just a few of the times when he acted consistently like a considerate and conscious being, not just the energetic, playful, and rambunctious Labrador Retriever I had known since the day of his birth. Indeed, these acquired characteristics certainly are not a part of what we normally consider to be typically instinctive canine reactions. These remarkably advanced responses while interacting with people always came about whenever Alex began demonstrating the things that he had learned from our earlier, formal training sessions together. But they evolved not only out of those daily practices. Indeed, they also occurred whenever he chose to imitate those who currently were around him.

These enormous shifts in his abilities remind me of the important experiments of Ap Dijksterhuis that were mentioned earlier in the chapter. Although the experiments of this Dutch social psychologist were solely designed for human beings, where he showed the almost instantaneous effects that imitative suggestions have on people, we also must consider the undeniable influence of imitation when it comes to other living creatures as well.

From his infancy onward, Alex exhibited the typical, boisterous behavior usually associated with many canine pets. However, as I have mentioned previously, with years of practice he also began demonstrating more considerate behaviors than those found in dogs who remained untrained. For that matter, he was conducting himself in a manner even more desirable than certain poorly trained human individuals I have encountered throughout the years. Initially, Alex hesitated and often resisted before responding with kindness or consideration. However, by the end of his lifetime there was no longer any reluctance in such choices.

Without a doubt, as he grew older and *wiser* from years of endless, repetitive practice, he no longer vacillated when a decision to be *consciously kind* was facing him in any situation. He always responded wholeheartedly with remarkable benevolence.

I believe he did make cognizant choices to be kind regularly. In fact, after realizing how much he had progressed over time, it occurred to me that if my four-legged friend could learn to conduct himself in such an exemplary manner, should it not be an imperative for all human beings to practice mastering such behavior as well, especially since so many people regard themselves as being far superior to any other species on this good planet?

In order for us to become the conscious gardeners of our lives, we too must practice

kindness habitually. After all, it is an essential part of perfecting our true nature. Excelling in kindness is undeniably a genuine flower found within the garden of our mind; and it is just one of many indispensable steps that ultimately leads each of us into a sacred oneness with all being, teaches us how to instigate our total balance with the universe, and blesses us by reigniting the all-encompassing flame of divine love forever dwelling within all that exists.

XI.

Practiced leaps in learning...

From the preceding narratives, we can appreciate how Alex and I practiced continuously with each other during most interactions we had. His abilities to learn and even to teach[62] certainly became more effective as our working and playing together continued to evolve. During the course of his life, my aims for our practice became more precise and more mindful.[63] I hoped to create sessions that were correct (effective and efficient), complete (never ending until he accomplished successfully at least one important objective),[64] conscious (developing our individual and mutual awareness through tireless repetition—reinforced by my intentions to maintain non-dualistic, compassionate, balanced, and disciplined interaction between the two of us), and consistent (regularly conscious, correct, complete, on a daily basis).

---

[62] Aside from Alex teaching me many things about his abilities to practice and learn, he taught other dogs several alternative ways to interact, especially how to be more gentle and how to share food. Several neighbor dogs were very rough with smaller animals and would become almost vicious when protecting their food from others. However, after Alex intercepted their rough advances on smaller animals and also after he began sharing his food with all of them, they became more gentle and sharing over time—not only with Alex but with other dogs as well.

[63] Needless to say, my intentions and abilities to guide Alex's practice also needed constant practice. Consequently, these intentions and abilities didn't manifest instantaneously, but required many years to develop fully. Teaching skills must be practiced as much as a student's aptitude for learning must be practiced in order for both activities to progress in a fully conscious, consistent, correct, and complete manner.

[64] Infrequently, if he became so inattentive or resistant that I couldn't reinstitute his ability to focus, then I was compelled to end our sessions prematurely. By continuing any further, I would have begun to establish practice habits that were both ineffective and inefficient (or incorrect), thereby creating a serious incompleteness due to these incorrect results. When any of the *Four Cs* are violated, then none of the four parts of this *recipe* truly manifest.

In the following passage from Dr. Amit Goswami's, *The Self-Aware Universe: How Consciousness Creates the Material World*, Goswami[65] illustrates in lay terms (yet, from a scientific perspective), an intriguing process I believe to have been active in many of my dealings with Alex, with several other pets, with service dogs (already highly trained to assist the visually and hearing impaired), and also with countless people—including the majority of my music students:

> …A book lies on a table in front of you. A person picks it up and utters a meaningless sound, pointedly attracting your attention to the book. Suddenly you understand the meaning of his behavior. He is telling you the word in his language for *book*. How did the meaning of his action arise in your consciousness? It involves nonlocality[66]—a jump[67] out of your local space-time system.[68]
>
> The extraordinary nature of this communication may not be obvious to you because it is so familiar. Imagine, however, that you are the young Helen Keller, deaf and blind since infancy.[69] When Annie Sullivan alternately held Helen's hand under the water and signed the word *water* into her palm, Miss Sullivan was using the same context of communication as in the example involving the word for *book*. Helen must have thought that her teacher

---

[65] Physicist, researcher, university professor, author of numerous books and scientific papers.

[66] According to Goswami, nonlocality is:

> …an instantaneous influence or communication without any exchanges of signals through space-time; an unbroken wholeness or nonseparability that transcends space-time; see also *Transcendental domain*.
>
> *Transcendental domain: Pertaining to a realm of reality that is paradoxically both inside and outside of physical space-time. According to this book [Goswami's *The Self-Aware Universe*] the transcendent realm is to be interpreted as being nonlocal—it can influence events in space-time by making possible connections without exchange of signals through space-time. See also... *Potentia*.
>
> *Potentia: The transcendent domain of the probability waves of quantum physics.

[67] Compare to a *quantum jump*. According to Goswami, the quantum jump is:

> …a discontinuous transition of an electron from one atomic orbit to another without going through the intervening space between orbits.

[68] Goswami defines *locality* as:

> …the idea that all interactions or communications among objects occur via fields or signals that propagate through space-time obeying the speed-of-light limit.

[69] According to *Wikipedia*, Helen Adams Keller (1880–1968) was:

> …an American author, political activist, and lecturer. She was the first deaf-blind person to earn a bachelor of arts degree. The story of how Keller's teacher, Anne Sullivan, broke through the isolation imposed by a near complete lack of language, allowing the girl to blossom as she learned to communicate, has become widely known through the dramatic depictions of the play and film *The Miracle Worker*.

> was crazy until the meaning of her teacher's actions broke through—until Helen made a jump out of her existing contexts and into a new context.

There certainly were many instances where this type of *jump* occurred in Alex's training. His dog tags often jingled after being asked to shake the water off his fur before entering the house whenever it was raining outside. Yet, somehow he was able to process this jangling noise as a way of signaling me every time we were hiking in the wilderness together.

It is true that I spent considerable time showing him the difference between rough and mild interactions, insisting that he behave more gently. However, no one taught him directly how to intercede when other dogs were acting too aggressively with puppies, nor did anyone teach him to demonstrate to his canine friends how to share their food with one another. There was a point—or possibly a *jump*—when he was capable of understanding these things by himself.

To be sure, Alex didn't exhibit these abilities early on. They obviously were *skills* he acquired over time. Perhaps, with the help of these *jumps*, all of us acquire insights to practice teaching ourselves and learning from ourselves. I don't believe that this is something unique to human beings; but more likely, it is a phenomenon that can be realized in members of any species if the appropriate inputs or *signals* are introduced.

Some might argue that animals other than humans have no capacity for conscious learning or teaching. I agree, but only if their circumstances do not permit an effective process that develops teaching, learning, and a subsequent consciousness. However, this is also true with human beings. Charles C. Mann speaks of such a case in his work *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*:

> Although the Sirionó are but one of a score of Native American groups in the Beni,[70] they are best known. Between 1940 and 1942 a young doctoral student named Allan R. Holmberg lived among them… Incredibly, they could not count beyond three.…

Because Alex readily could count to ten and the Sirionó could only count to three, does it mean that this particular human group was less capable of learning (or acquiring consciousness) than my dog? Of course, this is not necessarily the case. Yet, whenever the situation is in reverse—showing humans to be performing more proficiently than other animals—

[70] A province in Bolivia.

then we readily jump to the unscientific and erroneous conclusion that anything indicating our ability to outperform other animals is incontrovertible evidence of our species as being the only one capable of learning complex tasks and ultimately achieving consciousness.

However, it is crucial to consider the following question. If a small child were raised in a laboratory, kept in a cage, fed a subsistent diet, given no affection, allowed minimal human interaction, never taught to read or write, given virtually no opportunities to socialize or communicate with others, could we then expect this being to live very long or behave any better than the most unconscious of wild beasts?

In William Golding's classic novel *Lord of the Flies*, a group of schoolboys traveled by plane across the Pacific Ocean during wartime. Without warning, they were suddenly shot out of the sky. After crashing on a deserted island, only some of the boys happened to survive; and since their pilot was also among the dead, no adults were left to watch over those youngsters who remained alive.

Although they initially acted like relatively well-behaved lads with a *civilized* background (retaining at least some of those practices instilled by adult mentors and family members), as their unsupervised time on the island lengthened (and with little hope of being rescued), most of them no longer resembled schoolboys at all. Instead, their current practices and behaviors began to deteriorate into those driven by the basest instincts imaginable. Because of this possibly inevitable transformation, almost all of them soon appeared to be nothing more than savage creatures with little or no indications of consciousness at all.

Although this story is a work of fiction, it nevertheless portrays a situation that certainly isn't implausible. In countless incidents throughout our history, there are factual accounts when individuals of our species reverted to the basest of animal behaviors when the constraints—and practices—of society were removed.

Before a few researchers, family physicians, and insightful caregivers were able to prove conclusively that many kids with special needs (such as those who were born with varying degrees of autism) were exceptional children with great potential, those youngsters were previously considered to be nothing more than unteachable misfits at best. Because they had been perceived as hopeless cases with no aptitude to learn anything, they were consequently stigmatized and branded for the rest of their lives—preventing them from integrating into the

rest of human society.

Equally, when it comes to the cognitive development of canines, I have occasionally heard the argument given by some professionals that dogs can never acquire the ability to speak since they have no capacity for consciousness whatsoever. On the contrary, they cannot speak like we do—not because they are incapable of consciousness, but because they don't have the appropriate physical apparatus to produce human forms of vocalizations. We have relatively firm, supple tongues that fit compactly behind a set of evenly-spaced teeth, essential for producing the types of sounds used to form our spoken words.

In contrast, dogs have long, floppy tongues that normally hang loosely out of their mouths. Their teeth are not positioned effectively for shaping such sounds with their inordinately limp tongues. It isn't that they have no abilities for learning human speech; canine anatomy simply prevents them from doing so. Consequently, a viable form of communication can never be developed, taught, or learned in the same way verbal languages have evolved among human beings. The physiological differences between our two species prevent this from happening. Instead, modified techniques of teaching and learning must be ascertained, promoted, and applied.

When I was quite young, I vividly recall watching a television program where a trainer had shown several German Shepherds how to talk. Instead of forming words with their teeth and tongues, they made high-pitched, whining sounds while inhaling through their throats. In this fashion, they had been taught to communicate numerous, short sentences and greetings. These *spoken* sounds that the dogs manufactured were quite bizarre, even eerie. Nonetheless, with an appropriate, innovative approach, these dogs learned how to speak actual sentences in English. If memory serves, I believe that these dogs also conversed (although nominally) with each other using this unconventional approach.

However, even though I was just a young boy at the time, it made a lasting impression on me to observe how physically demanding it appeared to be for each of them to speak in this manner. Over the years, it also became apparent eventually that if they were to learn a truly sustainable way of communicating through the use of human language, another approach would need to be devised. I cannot imagine anyone continuing to inhale their words for prolonged periods of time. It would simply be too exhausting to do so, and I suspect that this incredibly awkward method could eventually damage the vocal chords as well.

Some might argue that, although these German Shepherds could speak simple words

and ideas, they weren't able to understand underlying meaning and structure. Maybe they couldn't understand those sorts of things. Yet, maybe they could.

Most assuredly, human children at this skill level of communication wouldn't have any significant abilities in comprehension either. It takes years of practice (and perhaps including the practice of *jumping)* to acquire such facility.

Before Alex was born and during the first few years of his life, I lived next to the people who raised Alex's mother. Unlike my puppy (who had mostly shiny black fur, save his white bib and four feathery tufts at the tips of each of his paws), his mom was mostly white with multiple light-brown blotches across her entire body. This is something I also mentioned earlier in the chapter.

Another distinct difference was that Alex learned to be a relatively quiet companion while his mother was encouraged to be extremely vocal much of the time. Not only did she tend to bark and growl continuously, but she also whined, yelped, gurgled, sputtered, and performed many other vocalizations that would be difficult to describe here.

It was only after witnessing one of her more spectacular *doggy monologues*—where she slid the pitch upward from her absolutely deepest whine until it had been raised more than two octaves above that original moan—when I was reminded of those very vocal German Shepherds starring in that television show decades earlier. This amazing vocal shift of hers was achieved by inhaling the entire time.

Once she had reached the shrill note at the top, the future mother of my Alex seemed to suck in her breath even harder to execute a screeching crescendo on that extraordinarily high tone. The entire stunt was an impressively complex series of vocal manipulations. If such a performance were instigated by a human being rather than a *mere* household pet, anyone witnessing this may well have thought it to be a feat of musical comedy remarkably well-improvised!

After witnessing several dozen of her vaudevillian-styled shenanigans, I decided to see if she could be coaxed to use her well-practiced skill set in a way similar to those *talking* German Shepherds I saw on TV many years earlier. Knowing the types of sounds she tended to dream up, it seemed as though a likely possibility (both practical and beneficial) would be to begin by teaching her the word *please*.

I felt that she could master it with a nominal amount of training. *Please* seemed to fit nicely within the range of her current vocal repertoire; but also because of her exceedingly

unruly behavior (having been always spoiled by her family with almost no training of any kind), I thought it might be appropriate for her to start asking for things politely instead of regularly grabbing tasty treats off of the dining room table, the kitchen counter, or even out of someone's hand. Aside from that, getting her to *talk* might amuse the members of her human family enough to motivate them into teaching her other beneficial habits as well.

The only obstacle I could think of before starting on this linguistic adventure was that my neighbors' dog could be enormously willful and uncooperative at times. So, although I normally was opposed to dog-training strategies including bribery, I nevertheless decided that it might be the only way to win her undivided attention by enticing her with a few luscious doggie treats—a lure which I knew she couldn't resist. Considering that this was the only method my next-door neighbors used to get her to do anything at all, I figured that it would also be a reasonable bet for it to work in this particular instance.

The first thing to consider was that she certainly was incapable of employing her mouth to create sounds in the same way we humans do to form words. As I have explained before, this is a physiological impossibility for any dog to achieve. It therefore would be a futile endeavor simply to have her try imitating exactly whatever comes out of our mouths.

Consequently, I felt the most effective way to proceed was by breaking down the chief elements of the word into three connecting sounds and have her familiarize herself with each separate segment individually. For starters, each of these parts needed to be practiced and mastered one at a time.

Furthermore, when demonstrating each little piece to her, I used the sounds and techniques to produce them that I already witnessed her performing on her own. So when I asked her to imitate them, she actually was able to do so without too much struggle. After only one reasonably brief practice session, she had the word down perfectly.

But to begin our exercise, she needed to be taught the dual-consonant formation of *PL*. While observing her vocal antics over several years, I noticed that she would often make several types of sneezing noises while clowning around with her human family. One of them could be easily modified into a somewhat boisterous *PL* noise by having her jerk her head forward and down during the course of her sneezing tirade where she would blow the air past her lips—vibrating them in the process.

Once she was able to achieve this *PL* sneeze several times in a row, then it was time to move on to the second part of the word: the long *eeee* sound. Because of witnessing her being

able to sustain a high-pitched whine by either inhaling or exhaling a deep breath before or while she was doing it, I thought that it would be equally feasible for her to produce a prolonged *eeee* in a similar manner, and then finishing with a *z*-like *S* at the end.

Predictably, she could both inhale and exhale her *eeee*'s just fine when they were isolated by themselves. But when we tried to connect the initial *PL* sneezing-action to a long-inhaled *eeee*, she literally fell over sideways in her whole-bodied attempt to shift gears from a robust exhale to a sudden inhale.

Although the unexpected antic was hilarious to observe, I didn't want her to try it again for fear that she might injure herself in the process, because her first attempt was almost convulsive in nature. It was so exuberantly executed that her end result was truly violent. So, I quickly came to the conclusion that some serious toning-down was definitely in order if she were to proceed further without sustaining any injuries.

Since she already was successful in producing her over-enthusiastically executed *PL* outburst, I realized she was putting an enormous amount of energy into an exhalation. It was because of this that it seemed more likely for her to connect the *PL* with an *eeee* by continuing with the exhalation instead of trying to reverse the airflow by sucking it inward. After demonstrating what I wanted her to do and subsequently watching her perform an effortless execution of the two sounds in succession, she then expressed delight in her own accomplishment by repeating the act countless times with rounds of wild tail-chasing inter-dispersed between each attempt.

Once I was able to calm her down by focusing her attention on the possibility of receiving yet another *cookie*, we still needed to accomplish one final thing before we could join all of those sounds together and form the entire word. In order for her to finish off with a buzzy little *Z* sound, I simply got my doggie protégé to quickly snap her jaw closed and simultaneously perform a brief sneeze while her mouth and lips were in the process of clamping shut. As she literally snapped a brief, explosive sneeze through her closed and tightened jaw, the *Z* sound completed the word.

Once she was able to perform each fragment of *PLEEEZ* by imitating my exaggerated demonstrations of each of the three essential components separately, then it was time to work on joining them to form the word in its entirety. Since she was so incredibly eager to achieve each oral antic successfully, receive more of my unrestrained praises, and most especially to gobble down a few more tasty treats in the process, she consequently remained totally eager-

to-please while I began showing her how to connect these individual sounds together.

After watching me use the exaggerated facial gestures (which I had been using throughout the entire process) to shape and sound out the complete word, she then was able to imitate me so precisely that her rendition of the word was practically perfect in just a few tries. Seeing how overjoyed I was with her grand achievement, she exuded her own maniacal bliss by bouncing continuously into the air like a kangaroo. This was her immediate response.

But as soon as we both settled down and reduced our excess jubilation to a *happy hurricane status*, I felt it was time for us to cross the driveway and bring my enthusiastic doggie friend back home. Her excellent accomplishment merited a little demonstration for her family. When we both entered the living room, there were nearly a dozen family members and friends watching the end of a TV show while patiently waiting for the evening meal to come out of the oven.

As soon as they saw us enter the room, many warm smiles and friendly greetings were passed in my direction. The father then proceeded to ask me what I have been up to. In response, I said impishly:

> This brilliant dog of yours and I have been practicing together.

Suddenly the room became devoid of any further chatter. None of them had ever considered this dog to be *brilliant*. After all, she was an ordinary farm dog with almost no training whatsoever. Indeed, she proved to be inherently clever in many respects but her frequent crafty displays were never considered to be in the same category as *brilliance* before now.

Nevertheless, everyone seemed to be intrigued with my rather unexpected pronouncement, and then several voices suddenly amplified the group's overall curiosity by shouting out variations on:

> Practicing what!?!

With relish and absolute delight I answered their chorus of questions with a somewhat cryptic answer:

> She has just had her first lesson in canine etiquette and is learning how to be a more polite and gracious dog.

After another brief hush came over everyone, the oldest son spoke up with no less than an

ample dose of skeptical sarcasm in his voice:

> Yeah, right. How so?

And I immediately replied:

> You know how she normally grabs food off of the table or pulls things right out of your hands? Well, no longer. Now, if she wants anything, she will sit down and ask you politely by saying *please*.

The daughter quickly retorted with:

> Wha' d'ya mean… ***says*** please?

Within the midst of this unexpected back-and-forth, someone must have turned off the television in anticipation of everyone's imminent mealtime exodus to the kitchen table, because the only noise that could be heard after the last question had been posed was a sharp ticking sound coming from the oven timer in the next room. So while this overwhelming stillness persisted, I declared with quiet insistence:

> I mean… she really speaks now and can actually say the word *please*.

Immediately, the air was saturated with a rippling of snickers, titters, and giggles. All of these obviously non-liturgical *antiphons* were apparent expressions of their amazement and disbelief. While sitting back in his recliner with legs crossed and arms folded over his chest, the father suddenly sported a sizeable grin, rolled his eyes playfully, and then blurted out:

> Sure she can!

But instead of offering any further explanation, I simply called their dog over to me. Once having her full attention, I reached into my pocket and brought out another doggie biscuit. After asking her if she would like to have it, this exceptional pooch politely sat down and wagged her tail with a fervent display of anticipation.

Then I spoke in an almost-whisper:

> What d'ya say first?

Without even the slightest hesitation, she very courteously sang out the word ***P-***

leeeeeeeeeee-z using the most melodious tones imaginable. After another silence resounded in the room for a few more seconds, the air suddenly erupted with riotous laughter. Once our *celebrity-of-the-hour* received her well-deserved cookie treat from me—obviously thrilled with the response everyone else was giving her—she went around among the multitude of fans surrounding her to be patted and praised in a no-less-than ceremonial succession.

The entire scene was akin to a greeting of groupies right after a rock concert. Even beyond this absurd characterization, the entire hoopla inspired me to imagine something even more ludicrous than that. I also visualized that we were all part of a receiving line in some imperial banquet hall where this esteemed dignitary (still just our plain, neighborhood farm dog) was dressed up in silken robes, ornate jewelry, and fancy footwear while sporting a pair of diamond-studded sunglasses. She strutted past each of us while we honored and congratulated her, being the enthusiastic and admiring courtiers that we were. Since none of us looked very regal nor could this old, dilapidated farmhouse ever be mistaken for someone's palace, it made my outlandish daydreams all the more hilarious.

Once some of the commotion eventually subsided, every kid and young adult in the room seemed it as an imperative to verify what had just happened. So one by one, they held up a cookie to see if she would actually say the magic word ***P-leeeeeeeeeee-z*** for each of them and went through the same motions over and over again!

Although it was a relatively simple task to get Alex's excessively loquacious mom to say this word, it would have been much more challenging and time-consuming if I were to teach Alex to do the same thing. After all, his ongoing practices were of a considerably different nature than those brief ones with which I engaged his mother. I would have had to allow him to become much more vocal than his lifelong training taught him to be. Because I worked at home and the creative nature of that work depended on having a relatively quiet environment much of the time, encouraging Alex to become significantly more loquacious (just to get him to speak a few words in English and possibly in French, German, Russian, or Japanese) didn't seem to be a practical tradeoff for the existing serenity we both shared while remaining indoors.

It is conceivable that I would have been able to get him to use his noisier skills only while he was outside. But not unlike having to train any of the most exuberant of youngsters to behave quietly at appropriate times, I would have undoubtedly had to endure periods of rebellious resistance while Alex continued to express himself noisily in the house while I was attempting to work.

After much consideration, I never could convince myself that it would have ever proven to be a beneficial option to encourage him to be more vocal—even though he might be able to utter a few choice words actually employing human speech. Instead, I finally came to the conclusion that all of his *practiced leaps in learning* should continue to be directed in less disruptive directions!

In Alex's early life, his scheduled training only occurred for thirty minutes during most days; and after the first two years, his formal practice sessions usually continued less frequently. What animals other than humans receive a structured education that spans over a minimum of a decade, for several hours daily? I often wondered how much Alex would have learned if I had been able to work with him six hours per day for six, ten, or even fifteen years.

Unquestionably, a suitable curriculum is needed for such an undertaking; and random, inconsistent supervision definitely could never provide the most effective or reliable results. However, having the opportunity now to look back at Alex's life in its entirety, I am able to see retrospectively how useful it would have been to maintain a regular daily practice routine with him for a much longer period of time. If I then had understood fully the value of ongoing, extended, systematic training for dogs, I might have continued working with Alex regularly even into his final years—at least, for as long as I could have afforded the time.

Regardless, he had been given a basic foundation in structured practice and learning that many pets never receive; and this obviously provided him ways to develop abilities that made my four-legged companion the unique individual he had come to be. Despite the fact that our formal, daily practices together spanned only a small portion of his life, these sessions augmented his capacity for learning, and they appeared to give him adequate skills for developing substantially in diverse ways, far beyond the parameters of his formal training with me.

Once again, let us consider the Sirionó's incapability to count beyond the number *three*. All skills (including counting) require not only being taught, but being taught with a suitable method for those particular individuals or groups who are attempting to learn anything unfamiliar. Apparently, there was no one in the Sirionó group—up until the time when Allan Holmberg was residing with them back in the 1940s—that knew how to instruct others in the performance or comprehension of this task.

I don't know if someone had ever attempted teaching them to further their counting skills

before Holmberg arrived (but failed in the attempt), or if after almost a century has passed since then that there hasn't been at least one individual who was successful in teaching them to count beyond the number *three*, and possibly to have taught them many other important skills as well. Regardless of whether these things have happened or not, it is vital to realize that one single method of teaching might not necessarily work for every group, nor for all individuals in any one particular group.

Part of mastering the practice of teaching is the importance of being able to recognize what is required for teaching effectively in any situation. Flexibility and creativity are crucial, even while rigorous discipline and structure are employed.

In order to practice and ultimately master both teaching and learning new skills and concepts, we must consider what practices already have been utilized by those who are trying to learn, regardless of whether the *learners* are ourselves or others. What beliefs are present that have helped or hindered the practice? What physical, mental, or emotional practices have been developed previously—either consciously or unconsciously—effecting the current practice results? Are any underlying habits an asset or a liability to the practice at hand?

Many years ago, I was acquainted with a remedial reading teacher in our district's junior high school. She worked with students who had serious reading difficulties. At the time, there was a young boy with whom she had become especially frustrated. He refused to read anything she gave him to try. After several months, she came to the conclusion that he was impossible for her to teach any further. In fact, she basically gave up on him altogether and pretended like he no longer existed. It was a truly terrible situation.

He normally sat in a corner by himself and barely spoke to anyone. A couple of months after this boy had been placed in this class, the adjoining high school provided his teacher with a volunteer student assistant. That assistant just happened to be me. It was no surprise when I was immediately *given* the boy to be my first assignment. While attempting to communicate with him, I not only could see that he was rugged and unkempt but also noticed how my young charge always smelled like an auto repair shop. His clothes were rarely clean and regularly stained with machine grease.

Considering his general appearance and overall behavior, I quickly surmised that the books previously given to the boy may have been an incorrect approach. Then, after asking him what he loved to do after school, the boy immediately perked up and exclaimed excitedly that he really liked trucks. He further indicated that he loved to help his father work on them in their

garage. It just so happened that this garage was part of their family business, which included a repair shop for large tractor-trailer trucks.

So the following day, I made certain there were several well-illustrated books about eighteen-wheelers[71] appearing on this young lad's desk. Right away, his ability to read was verified. Not only could the boy read and easily recite what was written on any page put in front of him, but I soon discovered that his reading skills were far greater than any other student in his class.

The moment I gave him those books on a topic he truly loved, he immediately became animated and exceptionally talkative for the very first time. Moreover, he started bringing in his dad's commercial magazines about truck sales and repairs to show the class. Only requiring occasional hints and suggestions from me, he otherwise was able to read through those magazines as if he were an adult; and whenever he might start to falter with technical words that were multisyllabic, all I had to do was offer a few simple tips and he was off and running again.

When I asked him why he refused to read before then, his reply was simple and to the point. His dad wouldn't want him looking at any of those *sissy* books. Only when he was given material that he felt would please his father did he begin demonstrating his genuine aptitude.

I have seen many instances where incorrect assumptions and approaches by teachers triggered adverse reactions in students, oftentimes affecting their abilities to learn and practice for the rest of their lives. Yet, when several of these cases were reassessed correctly and an alternate approach was employed by either an existing teacher or a new one, immediate and positive changes occurred with these students.

Actually, when I was very young, I just happened to be one of those cases myself. From about the time when I started attending kindergarten, the unfortunate habit of stuttering took up residence in both my mouth and in my mind. Although I have never known it to be referred to as a *habit* per se, I have in retrospect come to the conclusion that it indeed was something practiced continuously for a number of years. Of course, such a debilitating practice was actuated and sustained unconsciously. Although it occurred more persistently during school than while I was at home, it nevertheless remained a serious impediment in how I interacted

[71] According to *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary*, an eighteen-wheeler is:

> …a trucking rig consisting of a tractor and a trailer and typically having eighteen wheels.

with others until a truly remarkable teacher helped me to overcome the problem.

In the autumn of 1962, just before my tenth birthday, a new librarian was hired at the local elementary school where I was in attendance. Unlike her predecessor—who remained aloof and inaccessible to most students—she instead was the complete opposite. During the first week of classes, it was announced that all grade levels (from kindergarten on up) were to have their own private tours of the library; and a few days later, we were also told that fifth and sixth graders were to attend an actual *library class* at least twice a week. Since I was just beginning the fifth level myself, I was very excited by the idea of spending more time in the library, considering that I always loved books ever since I began exploring them as a toddler.

The previous woman-in-charge always scared me, so I almost never went near her nor the library where she usually loomed about like a dark cloud. This *bad-weather lady* perennially hung out in that room except on rare occasions when she was summoned elsewhere. Therefore, for most of my earlier years at school, visits to the library were few and far between. But once she resigned from her position and moved on to torment a new bunch of unfortunate students in another school, I was greatly relieved and actually got up enough courage to enter the formerly forbidden domain on my own.

Then, to find her replacement greeting me warmly (as though it were actually okay for me to be in the same room with her) was an enormous relief and a truly gratifying change from what I had always experienced in the past. This new librarian was someone who genuinely appeared to want us using her *reading and study room* as much as possible.

From the first time I met her, this was the term she always used with great fondness. In fact, I hardly ever heard her actually say the word *library* at all. Perhaps, she wanted to use a phrase that sounded less formal and more inviting to young people. Whatever was her purpose, it seemed to be working because after she became known to all of the students, her *reading and study room* tended to be always a busy place—unlike at any time before her arrival there.

From day one, she would enthusiastically show us how interesting (and even enjoyable) this *reading and study room* could actually be. But she also taught everyone how to make use of the row after row of mystifying and hitherto unapproachable books and the many other inconceivable resources offered in that one marvelous room. Moreover (and most importantly), we were encouraged to do so on a daily basis. Without our knowing, she was ostensibly teaching us to practice *using* the library.

Ironically, the only time that the word *library* generally travelled past the lips of our

school's new *custodian of books* was when she happened to be speaking about her innovative program that she introduced as the *library class*. This semi-weekly, thirty-to-forty-minute session was especially helpful for those of us who were completely daunted by the place.[72]

Despite her wonderful way of working with kids, she still was very strict, took no nonsense, and was even harsh to those who would misbehave or refuse to pay attention. She especially wouldn't tolerate talking. She insisted that her *reading and study room* was for two purposes only: reading and studying! Any unnecessary chatter wasn't to be tolerated. Only if speaking were essential to aid in our ability to read or study, then verbal communication might be permitted if it were carried out courteously in a quiet whisper. Anything else was completely unacceptable.

Because I always happened to be polite and well-mannered, she treated me with the utmost kindness whenever we were together. But there was also the issue of my stuttering, which certainly must have been apparent to her from the first time she heard me speak. It couldn't have taken very long for her to determine and assess my hyper-sensitive nature, so it was probably just another reason why she always remained sympathetic and encouraging to

---

[72] The *library class* immediately became a mandatory part of the curriculum for all fifth and sixth graders. We each had two or three sessions per week depending on the semester we were in at the time. In small groups of six to ten students, we were led among the book stacks where we could observe first-hand how those once-intimidating rows of floor-to-ceiling bookshelves contained a myriad of carefully organized portals into worlds of fantasy, humor, adventure, mystery, history, science, music, art, and other boundless realms of information and knowledge. Furthermore, they were readily accessible to anyone who would simply grab a book off of one of those shelves, sit down in a chair or on the floor, open the book to page one, and then begin to read!

Each of us was required to memorize the basics of the Dewey Decimal System. (According to *Wikipedia*:

> The Dewey Decimal Classification, colloquially the Dewey Decimal System, is a proprietary library classification system first published in the United States by Melvil Dewey in 1876.

Moreover, extra credit was awarded to any of us who would be willing to help out the librarian during our free periods.

We were also instructed in how to use the card catalog contained within about three dozen drawers that were located in several highly polished, beautiful wooden cabinets. These were the predecessors to our current-day indexes that normally inhabit computer files instead of existing upon hundreds or thousands of index cards stored within those sizable wooden boxes. In addition to learning about book binding techniques and how ancient scrolls and tablets were actually written upon, our librarian also introduced us to how we could readily access and employ every kind of reference material; and she also showed us how to do research using newspapers and periodicals. It didn't take long for these *classes* to become one of the highlights of my school week.

The first part of each class were spent learning about the various uses of, activities within, and histories concerning libraries in general—and about the various categories of books as well. After that, each of us was assigned a different task such as sorting and returning books to their proper places on the shelves, helping at the front desk where we were expected to check out and stamp the due date in the books when anyone was taking them home to study, and a weekly challenge to complete small research projects utilizing the library's resources in a variety of ways.

But my favorite part of our sessions in our *reading and study room* happened during the final portion of each class when we would all gather around the librarian on the floor as she read from many of the wonderful classics for children. She was a tremendous story teller and any residual rowdiness from her young audience was soon quashed whenever she began reading aloud. Her ability to draw us into those captivating tales was exceptional.

Needless to say, without the kindness, insight, and dedication of that beloved teacher, I seriously doubt that I would be writing these pages today. In fact, I also doubt my time spent in high school would have ended well; and it is highly unlikely that I would have ever finished high school if she hadn't been there for me during such a crucial and decisive moment in my life.

me, never once raising her voice. Even if kids were misbehaving nearby, she wouldn't scold them in my presence for fear of upsetting me. At least that is what I have come to surmise in retrospect.

Soon after I expressed my enthusiasm and willingness to work in her special room during my free periods, she immediately took me under her wing. Not only did she spend a great deal of time with me during school hours but eventually proposed that we work together after classes were over in the afternoon. On average, she began tutoring me two to four times each week, and there were several occasions when our after-school sessions lasted up to two hours. However, there soon came a time when I thought that I wouldn't be able to stay anymore because my mother no longer could pick me up. So, the teacher generously arranged with her to do all of the chauffeuring herself.

For many ten or eleven year old boys, such concentrated drilling wouldn't have been a welcome activity. But as far as I was concerned, these afterschool sessions tended to be the highlight of my day. Although painfully difficult and nerve-racking at first, I eagerly looked forward to all of our private classes together nevertheless.

The first thing that she did to improve the way I spoke was by encouraging me to slowly read aloud in her presence. This not only gave me more confidence to read and speak in front of others, but it also gave her the opportunity to show me how my speech could be improved with simple little exercises. For several weeks, she had me speak in very small increments over and over again. We regularly would stick to a single sentence, a particular phrase in that sentence, even one word that was especially challenging, or merely a syllable or two needing extra focus.

Despite these miniscule exercises, she never held back the praise whenever I was able to accomplish whatever was assigned to me at the moment, no matter how small or simple it might have appeared to be. In a matter of weeks, our daily lessons expanded from reading those tiny segments to reciting substantial paragraphs and—ultimately—entire stories. After only a few short months of practicing with her, I never stuttered again; and once I was able to speak with more precision, she then started to engage me in lively conversations about the books I was given to read and persistently challenged me in ways that significantly improved my abilities to speak and express myself articulately, as well as greatly increasing my proficiency in reading comprehension.

At the beginning of the year, all of these reading and comprehension skills were assessed

as being largely under par for my age. But after having worked with this wonderful *teacher of library classes* for a couple of months (while she taught me many other things as well), I actually improved to a level that few others who knew me at the time could have ever imagined or predicted.

Once she got me to a point where I was able to speak with other children without regressing into more stuttering, her next strategy was to have two classmates (who she was also tutoring) join our sessions so the three of us could work on our speaking and reading assignments together. By the time her little *trio* finished the fifth grade, we were all reading books that were almost never introduced to kids until freshman or junior classes in high school; and a couple of our reading assignments were actually considered as being college-level material.

Before I was taken aside by our dear librarian to coach me privately for nearly the next two years, my speaking disability had already become so well-ingrained that I eventually couldn't get through a single sentence without extending it into a lengthy series of stammers and stutters, especially when I happened to be at school. After all, elementary school was where a series of traumatic events took place and most likely were (at least) a partial reason for the stuttering to take hold in the first place.

I was extremely nervous, insecure, and painfully shy as a young boy and vocal *sputtering* turned out to be a convenient stalling mechanism that gave me extra time to think about what I might say. Because I had been ridiculed so fiercely in front of my peers—especially by teachers in kindergarten and the third grade—I was terrified of being laughed at and humiliated. So consequently, while I was always preparing myself for anyone and everyone to make fun of or bully me (or to be scolded by teachers for reasons I never fully understood), it seemed to be in my best interest to take as much time as possible to make sure that whatever I said wouldn't be considered something worth making fun of or scolding me for.

When I first began grade school, the prospect of learning so many different things and making new friends in the process truly excited me. Consequently, I came to classes each morning charged with enthusiasm, great hopes, and absolute delight. However, only after a few days there, my very first teacher almost immediately began exhibiting an almost visceral disdain for me. I was continuously punished in ways that were otherwise reserved for (though with much less frequency and severity) the occasional smart aleck who was being either seriously rude or disruptive.

Being so young and inexperienced, I found it totally incomprehensible why she should treat me in such a manner because I tended to be as polite, respectful, and well-mannered as possible. However, this teacher frequently blamed me for things that I didn't do; and when that happened, she often would grab my hair or dig her fingernails into my shoulders, forcibly drag me to the front of the classroom yelling the entire time, and make fun of me while encouraging everyone in the room to do the same.

Once she started doing this, her example apparently encouraged a few of the kids who seemed to be vying for the twin titles of *school menace* and *class bully* to continue tormenting me for days afterwards. Consequently, this undeserved harassment from both teacher and students soon had a lasting effect on me. Rather than looking forward to going to school anymore, my initial enthusiasm was quickly replaced by both aversion and dread.

Aside from the frequent victimization and harassment occurring on an almost-daily basis, there was one particular incident that must have been the final straw. It certainly couldn't have been simply a coincidence when I began to stutter uncontrollably just a few hours later for the very first time. Sad to say, this single, traumatic incident seemed to initiate a pattern of stuttering and stammering that lasted for the next several years.

It persisted in varying degrees of severity until I met the wonderful librarian who became both friend and mentor to me soon after first attending her library class—a totally unique concept at the time. She was perhaps the only reason that I ever overcame this handicap. After all, stuttering and extreme shyness had been one of the chief obstacles during my earlier schooldays. She certainly helped me to vanquish the stuttering and greatly improve my painfully timid nature in general, though it took many more years before I was able to overcome that extreme bashfulness completely.

While I attended kindergarten, we always had a *rest period* immediately following lunch. It typically lasted for a half-hour. During this time, the teacher would turn off all lights and lower the window blinds; and then we were supposed to roll out our personal floormats, quietly lie down, close our eyes, and take a short nap if possible.

In theory, this seemed to be a sensible idea. It would give those of us who were the youngest members of our school community a chance to recharge before either heading home or beginning afternoon classes. (Since kindergarten students only had half-day sessions, we either started or ended with lunch followed by a brief period of *quiet time*.)

A few kids seemed to be able to fall asleep *on command*, so it was easy for them to take

a little snooze after having had their lunch on most days. All the teacher had to say was:

Close your eyes and go to sleep!

But for the rest of us, we weren't as capable of doing so, not even occasionally.

Consequently, endemic fidgeting, silliness, and getting into mischief were likely to be the most frequent and obvious alternatives. In fact, these substitute pastimes turned out to be the predominant pursuits in which my more high-spirited classmates commonly engaged themselves; and there were a couple of veritable troublemakers who simply saw the time as a ripe opportunity for stirring up the other kids as much as possible. If they could cause even the slightest disruption without being caught, I believe they considered it to be an outstanding achievement.

On the other hand, those of us (including myself) who had rather introverted dispositions seemed to be more capable of resting quietly. Unfortunately, we often became the target of practical jokes engineered by those who wanted to incite some sort of daily devilry. In fact, it was this sort of mischief that set me up to be punished in a manner that turned out to traumatize me for a very long time.

Although I was an especially reticent child when interacting outside of the family, it nevertheless delighted me whenever other classmates would make even the slightest overtures of wanting to be chums. Those who did become my closest friends definitely had to approach me exactly in this fashion because I had absolutely no idea how to talk with them first. However, a few of the more unruly kids (possibly wanting to be friends as well, but just not knowing how to do it without terrorizing me in the process) invariably set me up to suffer the brunt of their frequently injurious pranks, both physically and emotionally.[73]

---

[73] As was mentioned in the Preface, I grew up on an isolated country estate where there was almost no interaction with other children except for my brother and sister. So when I first attended school, I had almost no experience interacting with kids my own age. Consequently, I became an easy target for bullies. For the entire seven years I spent in primary school, my greatest fear was going out on the playground during recess since it happened to be the most likely place where they would gang up on me.

Another reason why I tried to avoid our outdoor recess as much as possible was due to the daily softball games in which we were all expected to participate. Unfortunately, none of the adults in charge ever bothered to ask if there were any kids who didn't know how to play the game. I didn't even know what it was.

Consequently, whenever I happened to be directly involved in the activity, I was constantly yelled at by kids and adults alike because I not only didn't know how to hit, throw, or catch the ball, but I had absolutely no idea why and when players either ran from base to base or chose to stay put; and when my team was not batting but pitching instead, not one single person ever explained to me what to do while standing out in the field. In hindsight, I now believe that I probably was often in a state of shock because as my entire team would be screaming at me to do this or not to do that, I literally froze both physically and mentally. Therefore, I usually wound up remaining physically immobile while my mind lost its way in an overwhelming fog of bewilderment.

Early on, it was discovered by a couple of the bullies that I was hopelessly ticklish. It wasn't long before they made it known to everyone that I was easy prey and anyone could join in with the horseplay. Once they got me to anticipate their ongoing intentions of tickling me, all they needed to do was make an impish grin and wiggle their fingers insistently in my direction and I would burst out in nervous laughter—anticipating (or even dreading) what was about to happen next.

After this became a regular routine, a couple of the more likeable yet mischievous classmates soon discovered how to make me giggle on command. And much to their delight, it didn't take any time at all before they also discovered how to provoke me into letting out uncontrollable belly laughs as well. The only thing needed to accomplish this was for them to trick me into looking at them while they made a series of silly faces or whisper a few goofy words. Those simple antics would normally achieve their rascally goal.

During one particular rest period after lunch, the two of them stealthily slid their mats on either side of my own. In so doing, there was no possible way for me to escape their antics. I was trapped.

Immediately, they began their attempts to make me laugh aloud; and as soon as I realized what they were planning to do, my only plausible countermeasure was to close my eyes so as not to look at either of them. But whenever I did that, they just moved their blankets closer so it was easy for them to reach out an arm and poke me in stomach without being noticed by the teacher—that is to say, if she happened to be looking in our direction and actually cared that they were trying to provoke me in the first place.

Those ballgames on the playground were certainly part of an ongoing bad dream that never seemed to end for me. Because of the negative sentiment predictably rising up every day during our softball sessions, those with bullying tendencies capitalized on the frustrating situation by recruiting others who normally were friendly to me. But because of being cajoled and pressured, they too began to lash out, and not just for the remainder of the game, but virtually until I fled home in panic after school was finally over for the day.

I quickly had gotten such a bad reputation as the worst player in school that when both captains were selecting the members of their team for the day, I could always expect to be chosen last. And the captain who was stuck with me almost certainly would immediately cry out to an adult in charge, protesting why it was so unfair that his (or her) team had to be stuck with me.

Out of self-preservation, I soon found out a convenient way to avoid the playground altogether by conveniently making excuses to hang out with any sympathetic teachers who would talk to me while correcting papers, doing odd jobs around their empty classrooms, or even sitting down for a friendly visit. It became my *prime directive* to stay inside at all costs. If no teachers were available to give me a valid excuse to do so, I would then venture into the nurse's office. Because of the ongoing harassment, I never had to make up a reason for being there. I always had headaches, an upset stomach, and not infrequently would I immediately throw up in her presence. For this reason alone, there was never a need to feign an excuse.

Because I had much more interaction with adults who frequently visited my family than with children (especially in groups), I found it much easier to spend time with certain teachers after class and speak one-on-one with them rather than join in with the uncontrollable *herd* of kids romping out-of-doors. Quite frankly, I had almost no prior experience with any such situations.

If a more fair-minded adult had been in the room at the time, the most logical thing for me to do would have been to inform him or her of my predicament immediately. However, the couple of times when I had attempted such countermeasures with this particular teacher in the past, my efforts only made things worse. So in this case, when their tickling finally overcame my resolve and I simply let out somewhat of a suppressed guffaw, the teacher immediately glared at me and waved her fist menacingly in my direction. Then, while gritting her teeth, she raised her voice to nearly an all-out yell and viciously barked that I better cut it out.

So my two adjoining bedfellows decided to remain perfectly still for the next several minutes until she cooled off a bit. They even pretended to be asleep. But as they also kept opening their eyes just a crack to see if she finally lost interest and returned her attention to whatever she was doing prior to the incident, these two little monsters-in-disguise eventually noticed that she stopped glaring at me and in due course turned her attention elsewhere.

At the exact same moment, they both seemed to agree telepathically that the time was ripe to pester me once again with their foolery. So immediately after lunging at me in chorus, they began their blatantly fierce tickling assault upon my stomach, neck, and armpits. My body convulsed franticly in response; and within a few seconds, I couldn't contain myself any longer. My deliberately muted mirth erupted into uncontainable laughter.

Almost simultaneously, the teacher turned her head once again in my direction. Although she had definitely seen the other two boys retreat from having their busy hands all over me, she ignored their nonsense nonetheless. Instead of her demanding that they stop the tom foolery at once (or better yet, insist that they take their mats up to the front of the room where she could keep a closer eye on them), rather she accused me of disrupting the class though my sole indiscretion was to be the brunt of a practical joke inflicted upon me by others.

Even as I politely raised my hand to get her attention so I could apologize and explain what had actually happened, her only response was to rush over to the three of us, grab me forcibly by the hair, and yank my entire body upward. Then she abruptly dragged me to the front of the class without ever letting me stand on my own two feet. After screaming some exceedingly hurtful and demeaning words, the teacher continued hauling me by the hair to a small, cluttered, and filthy broom closet where she opened the door, threw me in bodily, slammed the door shut, and locked it with a key.

Since I was assigned to afternoon classes for the first half of the year, my school day had only just begun. But instead of releasing her young prisoner from that dark and stifling cubicle

after the rest period was over, she kept me there all afternoon until classes were dismissed for the day. After all of the other kids piled out of the room and headed towards the loading area (where buses were waiting to take them home), beyond the immediate confines of my makeshift cell the classroom became suddenly silent.

Eventually, I heard a single pair of footsteps ominously approach the cupboard in the semblance of clopping, clacking high-heeled shoes. The door lock suddenly clicked as it made contact with the counter-clockwise turn of a key; and without further delay, my prison gate flew open, the teacher leered at me without uttering a single word, turned her head towards the hallway as a signal for me to leave, and backed away slightly so I could finally escape from that dusty, chalk-saturated lockup.

Understandably, I was in a state of panic, dehydration, and shock. With tear-stained face and swollen eyes, I fled for home. After arriving there, my mother saw how upset I was and asked what had happened. The next day she called the principal of the school and told him what I had told her. But when he finally investigated the situation, he sided with the teacher who denied everything.

She claimed that it was necessary to verbally admonish me for misbehaving. Anything else that I might have alleged simply wasn't true. Since both my parents were inclined to be intimidated by authority figures (including school principals and apparently teachers as well), they told me that there had been a misunderstanding, the teacher was a very nice lady, and I better not cause any more trouble in class.

No further protests of mine were acknowledged by my parents other than their getting increasingly angry with me. This continued to happen whenever I dared to bring up the subject again, so I eventually gave up trying to convince them that she was lying.

Needless to say, from that day forward I was petrified of going to school and face her again. Although she left me alone for the next few weeks, she did put me in the closet on two other occasions—justifying her actions to my classmates with totally absurd excuses for doing so.

It is important to note here that within the next couple of years, she was summarily dismissed from her position at the school for undisclosed reasons. For me, it was a great relief when my mother read about it in the newspaper. I felt that an enormous weight had been lifted from my life because she would never cross paths with me in the hallway ever again.

Indeed, it was early on in that traumatic first year of school when my stuttering began.

I remember it vividly to this day. My father had also been a horrible stutterer when he was younger—due to experiencing his own set of personal traumas—so when I showed symptoms of the same affliction after coming home from my first *internment* in the broom closet, he started barking at me for not speaking clearly and made fun of my inability to do so. He even mimicked sarcastically whatever stuttering sounds came out of my mouth at the time.

Although these mocking attempts to prevent me from falling into the same trap that apparently afflicted him for many years were callous, brutal, and at times truly damaging, I still didn't blame him for his unthinking actions. He was an inarticulate man himself and it was never likely for him to be capable of expressing his concerns for me in any other way at the time. Nevertheless, the harassment didn't have any positive effect either so my stuttering continued.

It's true that I tended to stutter much less at home—probably out of fear of my father's reactions and also because it was a much more familiar environment to begin with. However, his reproaches nevertheless seemed to add to the problem while I was at school, because my stuttering and stammering continued to get worse—especially when I was yelled at by certain teachers or bullied by classmates. Indeed, if I hadn't met the wonderful *library lady* roughly five years later, it's most likely that the horrible *habit* of stuttering still might be hindering my speech even now, more than a half-century later.

When the good librarian became my foremost instructor at the time, there was a definite moment when every trace of stuttering and stammering seemed to disappear all at once, as if by magic. And many years later, there was that other transformative instance when I was tutoring the junior high school boy who (at first glance) appeared to be incapable of reading practically anything. However, the boy immediately proved this assumption to be totally false as soon as I handed him some books about trucks.

It goes without saying that they obviously sparked his interest like nothing else had done before then. Indeed, these are just two examples of major shifts taking place in what seemed to be only a flash or *twinkling of an eye*.

In the case of that boy who loved trucks, his reading teacher continued to ignore him despite the constant improvements he made; and even though these sizable gains were recognized and praised by all his classmates and several onlooking teachers as well, she nevertheless continued to complain that he was a hopeless case, utterly unteachable. Apparently, since my success with the boy became known to a number of other faculty members, that particular teacher made excuses to the administration why she no longer needed

me as an assistant.

So at the beginning of the next term, I was placed with an English teacher who was especially excited about how I was able to find such a simple solution for many of the boy's learning deficits. But much to my great disappointment—because of illness interfering with my ability to continue helping kids who needed private tutoring—I unfortunately was forced to leave the program despite how much I loved working there. My own attendance at school simply had become too unreliable because of the great number of sick-days I was forced to take.

Aside from these two examples, there are numerous other occasions mentioned throughout this book when immediate transformations have arisen through sudden *leaps in learning, aptitude, performance,* and *perception*; and if each of us looks back into our own lives and the lives of those who surround us, we are definitely going to recall countless other instances when such shifts, leaps, or *jumps* (as suggested by Dr. Goswami) have surfaced from time to time.

Similarly, if we recall the enormous improvements and positive changes manifesting from these so-called *jumps*, it would be useful to examine a likely cause for them. Whenever I have witnessed such occurrences, they always seemed to surface immediately after periods of constant, repetitive practice. For me personally, my stuttering would have never been eradicated without the ongoing, repetitive drilling to which I was so fortunate to be subjected continuously by my dear librarian friend.

The junior high boy—who I tutored—read so well because (unbeknownst to any of his teachers at school) his father had been encouraging him to read aloud while they were working on trucks in his repair shop. So, much of his practice occurred as an informal routine at home while definitely not being improved upon in the classroom at all before I first met him. The only reason that my otherwise negligible insight into changing his reading material actually worked was because he had already been practicing his reading skills with his dad's trucking magazines for a very long time beforehand.

The apparent shift wasn't really about his ability or inability to read but rather with his sudden willingness to open up in the presence of both his teachers and classmates alike. And in so doing, this sudden change in how he responded to others at school most likely had a lasting effect in other aspects of his life as well.

In Helen Keller's case (described earlier by Dr. Goswami), extensive repetition occurred between the girl and her private tutor Annie Sullivan before the girl was able to make the first

jump into truly communicating with her teacher. It took an enormous amount of practice for Helen to understand what Annie was conveying through the use of sign language. In this case and in every other case mentioned throughout the book, some sort of repetitive practice always seemed to be a prerequisite for any truly transformational *jump* to occur.

Within this delusory realm of seeming separations that we appear to inhabit, a vital technique for creating uniquely unifying results forever exists inside each of us. Our material universe—founded on the potent illusions of time, space, and the ostensibly separating distances between each point in time and space—no longer can conceal from us the gateways back into the garden of balance, oneness, and divine love.

Whenever we initiate continuous, reiterating *echoes* of our thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, or actions, such repetitive practice can effectively become a bridge or conduit. It has potential for surmounting any barriers and rifts caused by time, distance, space, or any other dualistic, illusory weed. It can bring us into whatever condition or *reality* we have practiced extensively.

Repetition breaks down the barrier of time existing between one moment and the next, this minute and that minute, the current hour and any subsequent hour, or the present day and an infinity of days within the past or future. Whatever we are practicing repetitively and non-dualistically, each recurring thought, idea, word, emotion, intention, belief, or action tend to melt these delusory delineations and have the potential for creating true oneness.

When we practice specific thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, or actions again and again—hundreds of times, thousands of times, even millions of times—then moment by moment, every second, minute, hour, day, and year fall away. They merge and join into a singular, exceptional practice as we *jump* out of time into a new certainty, break through that thin, delusory, separating veil of Maya, and are fully transported into the amazing reality forever existing at all levels within our mind garden.

The same thing manifests when any routine moves us through the deceptive confines of space from one step (or place) to another. After practicing an infinite number of these *steps*, great athletes occasionally feel some sort of transcendental *shift* while breaking records. They cannot explain how it is happening at the moment, but the change or *jump* always is perceived as being exhilarating, transformative, vividly real, and is sometimes described as if the athletes in question are no longer running at all—but flying instead, aboveground, on invisible wings.

Conscious, correct, consistent, and complete repetitions can eliminate the countless

obstacles (including all distances) found in space between this point and any other point. Transcendental practices can also dissolve the seeming separations between each and every person. Across the globe, divergent nationalities, cultures, politics, beliefs, technologies have the potential of being harmonized and joined with such an approach—despite what we are viewing nightly on the news. And equally, within the spatial confines of our own perceptions, all hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, and even life and death are capable of merging into the indescribable state of actual unity and equilibrium.

How is this possible? Inch by inch and mile after mile, moment after moment, and age beyond age, an infinite number of movements, thrusts, footsteps, lunges, compassionate gestures, and merciful intentions can ultimately fuse together—into one masterful practice—a transformational stroke that seems to defy not only the space and time normally yoking all of us, but even our lifelong practices promoting their inception.

Artists, musicians, actors, inventors, scientists, meditators, and anyone else who has expended extensive effort in mastering a single pursuit also tend to experience similar *jumps* out of time, distance, and space. These experiences can be transcendental in nature, oftentimes being completely life-altering.

It has been reported that Albert Einstein's theory of relativity came to him in a dream. He valued sleep as a critical factor for his intellectual development and overall health. Consequently, he practiced this state of bodily dormancy for at least ten hours each night. Perhaps his *relativity dream* simply was triggered by a jump into profound and life-changing awareness. Nevertheless, if he hadn't spent the majority of his life constantly studying, researching, and experimenting (each being a form of repetitive practice), it is unlikely that he could have made such a colossal breakthrough, regardless of how it actually emanated.

But Einstein wasn't the only one who made significant discoveries (or perceptual jumps) while simply dreaming. Apparently, many groundbreaking advances arose out of the dream state. In 1861, Russian chemist and inventor Dmitri Mendeleev *envisioned* his periodic table of elements while sleeping. Another example of such an occurrence transpired during the year 1921. After being profoundly influenced by a dream he had one night, American physiologist and pharmacologist Otto Loewi was inspired to begin his first neurotransmitter experiments. Decades later, the structure of DNA allegedly revealed itself to molecular biologist and geneticist James Watson while he happened to be fast asleep.

Composers, painters, poets, and architects occasionally have conceived some of their

most luminous creations after first perceiving them as they were dreaming. Even while preparing for inevitable and disastrous defeats, renowned army generals have been known to discover in dreams unconventional solutions for victory, even changing the course of history dramatically.

However, in all of these cases, it would be highly unlikely that any breakthroughs could emanate from dreaming without enormous amounts of prior practice in one form or another. Tireless repetition is essential for acquiring an ability to *jump* out of any context into each new possibility, new result, and (ultimately) into all new manifestations.

It makes no difference whether these changes occur in transformational dreams or through the vibrant waves of waking moments. Equally, it makes no difference if they materialize out of the seeds of dualistic weeds or the germs of flowers and other virtuous plant life in this garden of our mind. In other words, these new realities—and any *jumps* that might assist in bringing about such transformations—always manifest from repetitive practice. Despite whether our efforts are conscious or unconscious, consistent or inconsistent, correct or incorrect, complete or incomplete, any such transformation always seems to occur in this manner.

XII.

Beyond all training of our unique and separate selves...

As we continue to advance as individuals through teaching and learning, it is also advantageous to consider and observe what we teach and learn collectively within all of our conscious and unconscious group relationships. Thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions that we have repeated with others are part of these shared practices.

Some of our groups were mentioned previously, and perhaps it would be useful to

mention them once again. We can practice thinking, feeling, forming intentions, fashioning beliefs, and acting collectively as parents, children, and siblings; families, extended families, and friends; teachers, students, tutors, and mentors; widows, widowers, orphans, and the homeless; workers, laborers, and homemakers; hooligans, criminals, and tyrants; businesses, industries, corporations, and other hierarchical institutions; churches, temples, cults, and other religious and non-religious memberships; scientists, mathematicians, and those practicing diverse forms of medicine and healing; artists, musicians, actors, and other creative and performing types; psychologists, philosophers, historians, linguists, and countless confederations following fields of study, research, and other forms of intellectual pursuit; military, intelligence, political, and propaganda circles; nations, civilizations, and species.

Another essential group that should be considered seriously, as an initiator of our abilities to practice learning and teaching, is the collective we refer to as ancestry. Aspects of our genetic code might be considered as nothing more than a sum of practices that earlier family members have mastered. Likewise, we continue the process by bequeathing genetically that which we practice individually and collectively to each of our descendants. Our own ancestral group is thereby extended even further into future occasions and locations, forever surpassing the boundaries of time, distance, and space.[74]

It has been discovered recently that our genetic makeup is constantly changing. Genes are not the immutable *imprints* left us by previous generations that geneticists once thought them to be. The relatively young field of research known as epigenetics has broadened and reinforced further ongoing genetic studies that have repeatedly found these continual changes in our genetic makeup to be true. Rather than being the concrete building blocks of our corporeal selves transferred from one generation to the next, they instead have been discovered to be more flexible components that are greatly influenced by mental, emotional, and developmental inputs of the body compounded by environmental influences as well.

From a *mind-gardening* perspective, genes are merely parts of preliminary frameworks, assembled from the countless practices and masteries of forebears—thereby being influenced and shaped by their subsequent thoughts, emotions, corresponding behaviors, and interactions with the environments to which they have been exposed at the time. And ultimately, they have been then handed down to us through bloodlines.

[74] We should therefore consider that our ancestors existed not only in different times, but they also lived in different places. Our genetic *memories* from them transcend the distances of both time and space, and what we consciously or unconsciously activate in our genes is a manifestation of this group practice.

Yet, even these *practiced* constructions can be tailored and transformed by whatever we have chosen to practice and expose ourselves to in any current setting. This happens in the same manner as if we were renovating, rebuilding, or adding on to any manmade structure we have already created.

Furthermore, if we also possess within ourselves a truly intangible quantity—regardless of whether we refer to it as the soul, spirit, life-force, essence, or inner self—that unites with the physical body at birth (or at conception or during gestation) and departs from it at the time of death, then it is possible to conceive that whatever our ongoing, *eternal* selves have practiced before this lifetime is as much a determining factor regarding our current state of existence as the genetic configurations handed down to us by our predecessors. Therefore, all prenatal practices and choices should conceivably affect who we are now, determining (at least in part) the challenges and advantages we receive every moment of every day.

Whether or not we believe these aspects of ourselves to be real, practice is nonetheless an inevitable and essential ingredient of all life; and while we regularly employ every thought, idea, emotion, intention, belief, and action consciously, consistently, correctly, and completely as individuals (and with all of our groups), we undoubtedly will witness how balance, oneness, and divine love manifest in their infinite forms—within every aspect of our lives.

XIII.

Exercising true compassion or begetting more dualities...

Throughout this discourse, I have provided numerous illustrations and explanations relating to practice. Some of these examples were not always practices that incorporated the *Four Cs*. When Daniel Levin's ten thousand hour rule for attaining mastery was mentioned earlier, it should be emphasized here that he was obviously not speaking about mastering underlying thoughts and perfecting an ability to dissolve the torments of duality. He was simply

addressing the required skills of any given profession.

Although many individuals have tirelessly practiced perfecting the elements of their particular craft, how many of those achieving mastery have been capable of doing so without also practicing a collection of underlying, dualistic conditions as well? How many have been harmed or destroyed by opposing practices and *masteries* that grew and flourished unconsciously? How many have attained high levels of achievement while also being hindered by simultaneously practicing pride, greed, dishonesty, or selfishness? How many have been scathed by unconscious group practices of those surrounding them? This includes fans, business associates, colleagues, employees, employers, rivals, and even enemies.

How many have been affected adversely by practicing jealousy, scheming, betrayal, or excessive competitiveness? How many have been consumed by practiced obsessions, compulsions, egocentricities, deceits, and infidelities that grew into manifestations of alcoholism, drug addiction, divorce, critical illness, financial ruin, or the total alienation of family and friends? How many haven't been able to avert the hardship and heartache caused by such invisible practices, circumstances, and conditions that often are referred to as coincidence, misfortune, or the vicissitudes of life? And how many could have accomplished feats that would have been even more wondrous, if balance, oneness, and divine love had been perfected and integrated instead of a hoard of destructive, dualistic masteries?

If we choose to modify and ultimately rectify the results of these practices, it is crucial that we transmute all of our habits into those that are incited solely by compassion. No matter what we have practiced during this current reality, while seemingly practicing consciously or unconsciously, consistently or inconsistently, correctly or incorrectly, completely or incompletely (even including whatever we may have repeatedly rehearsed prior to our birth), it is imperative to infuse divine love into every regular routine of thought, idea, emotion, intention, belief, and action now. Only then can bodies, intellects, relationships, circumstances, and even entire worlds transform readily into a true manifestation of perfected existence.

- Chapter 5 -

The Conscious Gardener

I.

An anatomical portrait of gardens and gardening...

To be a conscious gardener we must forever practice consistently, correctly, completely, and consciously of course. But how do we accomplish this? When do our practices fully exemplify these ideals? What tools should we employ to facilitate actuating them into every aspect of our lives, and will the same procedures work for each of us, and in all instances? [1]

As we continue along this line of thought, it would be useful to liken conscious *mind gardening* to how we might put together and successfully manage an actual garden out-of-doors. Clearing a patch of ground is fundamental for such an endeavor. Obstructions like brushwood, tree stumps, rocks, boulders, remnants of old crops, and any other debris should be removed. Plowing is needed to aerate the soil and prepare it for the first planting.

Supplementing current conditions of the topsoil with compost and other nutritionally enhancing mixtures might be needed in order to produce healthier plants. Selecting the types of seeds we wish to cultivate would then be followed by spreading them methodically into the ground. Watering is also required. A fence might be raised to deter foraging animals. Other measures could be taken for preventing damage caused by insects, fungi, and other blights. As our plants begin to grow, staking and pruning might be useful to keep them healthy and prolific. Weeding and continued watering are normally required right up until harvest time.

If we perceive these activities simply as an outward reflection of tending the mind garden, a clear description of such a metaphor may assist us in the practice of conscious gardening itself. But to keep each practice routine uncomplicated, let us consider only the following six duties for the moment:

1. *Clearing*

[1] So as not to detract from the main thrust of this chapter, more detailed illustrations and specific examples of how I personally have utilized the various tools of conscious gardening will be discussed in upcoming chapters.

2. *Planting*
3. *Fertilizing (or nourishing)*
4. *Weeding*
5. *Fencing (or protecting)*
6. *Pruning*

As we examine and prepare both earthly soil and the soil of our minds, whatever is sown or planted determines that which will grow outwardly as a harvestable crop (or potential manifestation of mind). However, before we continue the comparison in detail between these two sorts of gardening—which will be covered later in the chapter—let us first begin by briefly portraying their broader, more basic similarities.

In order to produce a healthy crop, clearing the area that we wish to cultivate as an actual garden might be considered the initial phase of *weeding*, as was mentioned earlier; and in contrast, when we reflect upon our clearing and subsequent weeding of the mind garden's soil instead, this can be best fulfilled through various meditational and contemplative practices. Rather than having to remove brushwood, tree stumps, boulders, and the like, the inner debris that obstructs and contaminates our inner soil is filled with endless, opposing voices constantly struggling among themselves amid their futile and wearisome chatter. These internal wrestling matches systematically occur between one half of our dichotomous selves (tending to boss, deride, and nag) and the other half enduring or ignoring those onslaughts—often feeling the need to justify itself to the more aggressive and antagonistic side, acquiesce to ongoing abuses, or prepare to retaliate against those abuses. Naturally, this is only one example of the types of inner *noise* that can readily occur. In truth, the variety of mental competitions, debates, rebukes, critiques, and arguments is endless.

But as was just stated about using either the various meditational or contemplative methods, we can institute a gardening practice of mental *clearing* through which we can reduce and ultimately rid ourselves of all major hindrances and then further those processes (or similar ones) by subsequently and continuously weeding out our more subtle encumbrances. These include each of our dualistic entanglements of the past, present, and future before they have the opportunity to take root, grow, blossom, seed, and proliferate again and again.

As our metaphoric persona—the conscious gardener—methodically clears the mind of intrusive *interior weeds* and *unconscious underbrush*, a place devoid of these interferences

needs to be realized so that we can perpetually sow seeds of divine love along with our most profound and joyful aspirations; and then, as those hopes and dreams of the heart proceed to grow unobstructed, we will also be able to use those meditational techniques for our subsequent, regular weeding routine (in order to maintain a continually *clear* and *balanced* region within ourselves). And by so doing, all that we have seeded may grow into robust manifestations yielding fragrant blossoms of compassionate existence without interference from additional mental or emotional *weeds*.

In an actual garden out-of-doors or within the confines of a greenhouse, after our initial clearing process has been accomplished, then it is time to consider what we wish to produce in our freshly prepared garden. Do we want to cultivate fruits, vegetables, grains, herbs, flowers, perennials, or perhaps a wondrous assortment of them all? Picking out what types of seed packets or bulbs to purchase from our local garden centers, regional department stores, or online seed companies can often be a challenge, but how can those seemingly tough choices be compared with the momentous duty we have as conscious gardeners to select the suitable thoughts to be implanted within the soil of our minds from moment to moment, hour to hour, during every day of our lives? Deliberating on anything less than that doesn't constitute conscious gardening.

To continue with the idea introduced in Chapter 1 wherein our thoughts are simply seeds of mind rather than of earth, it is vital that any of those *thought-seeds* we have chosen to *plant*—no matter how wide a variety of thoughts they might include—are filled exclusively with compassionate tendencies and a potential to manifest into divine love itself. Any qualities or characteristics other than these are dualistic by nature. Therefore, they will merely grow into more weeds, wholly unsuitable for conscious gardening.

Oftentimes our truest hopes and dreams are (at least, initially) filled with the divine love necessary for manifesting a tangible outcome essentially devoid of duality. But if we don't tend our garden diligently and *mindfully*, then many sorts of aberrations will be likely to develop, transforming potential blossoms of divine love into the illusory flowers of turbulences and strife forever wrestling with their endless, dualistic opposites.

After our choices of seeds have been made and planting has taken place, then the daily care by any gardener must begin. Naturally, when it comes to our outdoor garden plots, we have to regularly water, aerate, and fertilize the soil to provide optimal sources of nourishment.

However, in our mind garden the kind of sustenance needed for our seeds of thought to

grow into balanced and even blessed material forms frequently comes in the guise of *emotionalized* compassion and *magnetized* inspiration that should be injected (or projected) into those thoughts we wish to develop into mature manifestations. So if we charge ourselves with an *electrified* sense of joy, peace, and love while we pray, affirm, and meditate—even while initially emptying our inner soil of destructive weeds—we will be providing the necessary nourishment for all dreams founded in compassion to grow and flourish into the most miraculous and blessed of outcomes.

Once our seeds start to sprout and visible signs of growth begin to appear, then it is important to consider what measures we might take to protect our young seedlings in the backyard. As they continue to grow, insect deterrents, anti-blight treatments, plant coverings, or shelters (such as a greenhouse) can guard against pests, disease, and harsh weather conditions.

Oftentimes, the most effective way to protect our fledgling thoughts and the aspirations founded upon those thoughts is to shelter them from the scrutiny, criticism, and judgment of others by keeping them private and even secret from all *prying eyes* and *belittling* minds. In that way, we afford our dreams and ideas a time to gestate unhindered, to be nurtured in a balanced environment, and to ripen fully into the fruits of compassion we intend them to be. Then, when harvest is imminent, the *fence* of silence and the *shelter* of secrecy may be removed so that our materialized bounty may be shared by all.

There is one final task of any gardener that we will discuss now. The important practice of pruning removes portions of our plants that have become blighted or weakened as well as those having diverted too much energy from their main stalks. By gently removing anything seen as a hindrance to the outcome of our crop, we enable each plant to regain its former vitality and flourish so that its full potential will more likely be reached.

On the other hand, when it comes to *pruning* our thoughts, ideas, and intentions—including every hope and dream derived from these mind gardening components—our job is to shear away everything that would hinder our compassionate outcomes from manifesting when veering off course into aberrational webs of duality instead. Any time we are able to surmise our thoughts (or the offshoots of those thoughts such as emotions, intentions, words, and actions) to be growing away from the purposes and intentions filled with divine love, then it is essential to get out our mind-gardening pruning shears and trim them away. In other words, we must give our interior selves a periodic *haircut* in order to keep it from becoming wild,

unruly, and oftentimes obstructive.

Now that a broad description of the gardening metaphor has been established, it would be useful to provide an equally suitable illustration pertaining to the development of thoughts (as seeds) and how they might be perceived to grow into more substantial manifestations. Once specific thoughts that we choose to foster are focused upon—and we begin to utilize the garden methods mentioned above (or any similar techniques)—they will start to germinate and grow.

As these elusive, seemingly imperceptible germs are taking root and emerging as actual material outcomes, they can frequently produce offshoots of emotion. From the *seeds* of thoughts and the *offshoots* of emotions, *sprigs* of intention may grow. (At this juncture, let us consider intentions to be just our specific and resolutely directed thoughts.) As we nurture our intentions, they may develop further into *branches* of belief—thoughts that have grown and matured into those we actually claim for our own reality—and into the *leaves* of physical action as well.

Once this growing process is under way, any thought, idea, emotion, intention, belief, or action can be applied as a fertilizer to facilitate, enrich, and accelerate the development of subsequent seeds of thought, germs of ideas, offshoots of emotion, sprigs of intention, branches of belief, or leaves of action. As thoughts mature and ripen, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions are apt to arise as a direct or indirect result of those thought-seeds springing from the invisible soil of our mind: a veritable womb-domain of endless potential. Ultimately, thoughts bloom outwardly into what we perceive tangible reality to be at any given moment.

As this metaphor implies, every type of seed grows into sprouts and then upward as more hearty stalks. Thereafter, they can produce stems, branches, leaves, buds, blossoms, flowers, and even fruits or vegetables; and along the way, they also generate seeds, pods, tubers, or some derivative to potentially reproduce themselves.

In the mind garden, this process stimulates every thought to grow into further thoughts and ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, mental actions, and ultimately manifesting *outward* into physical actions and all other aspects of material existence. Just as there are noticeable and more subtle, seemingly unnoticeable shifts when each new phase of plant growth is reached, this also is true as the many transformations occur from our nurturing any particular thought while it matures and transforms into an actual physical manifestation.

When thoughts and ideas are practiced or cultivated by combining them together with other thoughts and ideas, they have the potential to evolve further into hybrids: some being

spiritual, mental, emotional, physical, or those occupying any other conceivable or inconceivable aspect of existence. Some are mental forms, such as concepts and perceptions. Some can be emotional, such as desires and hopes. They also can blossom fully into physically formed objects and beings, along with every possible and impossible condition, circumstance, consequence, interaction, or outcome.

Actually, the order of development from one offshoot of thought to any other regularly varies. For example, an action can manifest new beliefs or additional thoughts and ideas. Intentions often induce emotions. Conversely, emotion can produce intentions. Any combination or sequence is feasible. The permutations are no less limited than our ability to imagine them.

Ultimately, all thoughts and every subsequent idea, emotion, intention, belief, or action have the capacity to grow and materialize into infinitely changing manifestations. Perhaps, a mechanism that allows this to occur simply is a form of *jumping* from one state into another.[2]

II.

Overcoming tone deafness with tonal control...

When I was very young, my mother loved to sing with all three of her children. Although she never had any formal training, her voice was exceptionally beautiful. She sang all the time and taught us many songs to sing together.

This ongoing activity was mostly due to the fact that singing and playing music was a regular occurrence in her family as she was growing up. There probably wasn't a day that was devoid of at least some melodious strains of live music drifting out of the windows in my grandparents' old farmhouse.

If my mom had had at least some vocal training when she was younger, it is likely that she could have developed into a fine coloratura soprano. (Even without any previous guidance

[2] Refer back to the initial discussion on jumping at the beginning of Section XI in Chapter 4: *Practiced leaps in learning*.

at all, she frequently could just open her mouth and sing high *c*'s and *d*'s without any warmups or other preparation whatsoever. Moreover, as she pulled those notes seemingly out of thin air, her sound was predictably powerful and on pitch, resonant, always beautiful, and devoid of any strain.)

In comparison, I was fortunate enough to receive extensive formal training on numerous musical instruments that exposed me to a wide variety of techniques and approaches. When I was only four, my studies at the piano began in earnest. Then I learned to play the soprano and alto recorders after being drafted into an enormous sixty-piece recorder band in elementary school. Just a couple of years later, I was encouraged to try out for the junior high school orchestra and quickly learned rudimentary violin at the age of eleven; and once in high school, my teachers urged me to take up the cello soon after my thirteenth birthday.

Because I often listened to my first piano teacher prepare for organ recitals (he was a renowned organist), I was inspired to teach myself how to play the pipe organ when I was sixteen—reading several pedagogical books on the subject, going around picking the brains of several church organists who happened to live in the area as well, and eventually taking occasional lessons unofficially with organ faculty members while I attended college a few years later. And because in my grandparents' house there was a good assortment of various other instruments, I often would amuse myself by dabbling with both the button and piano accordions, the zither and autoharp, and various percussion instruments (including both bass drums and snares, cymbals, castanets, xylophone, and the vibraphone as well).

Aside from learning at least the fundamentals on numerous instruments, I regularly sang in choirs since I was in first grade. Three of my teachers began instructing me how to conduct both choral and orchestral ensembles and also introduced me to musical theory and composition so my own pieces began to materialize on manuscript paper at an early age as well. Because of being exposed to such a wide assortment of musical activities during most of my childhood, I quickly acquired many useful skills that also aided me in solo singing.

So even when I was very young, I already started developing excellent pitch recognition and definitely understood how to produce beautiful sounds as well. Moreover, I had a great deal of experience practicing good vocal projection and tonal control. Therefore, to non-musicians who heard me sing occasionally (or more frequently, when I played the piano), they would often mistake those well-practiced skills for *God-given talents*.

Because neither my brother nor my sister had developed any such proficiencies, the lion's

share of praise was doled out exclusively to me. As a result, they would often be very reluctant to sing when asked—especially my dear brother—because both of them would frequently have their *performances* critiqued and often compared to my own.

These types of insensitive and belittling responses from ill-behaved adult audiences were commonplace in our household. They definitely caused my brother and sister to become intimidated and discouraged. However, the effect on my brother had truly detrimental consequences that totally quashed any desire to use his singing voice in the future.

But it wasn't for any lack of *talent* that made him less musically able than his older brother, he simply had no experience practicing or developing vocal skills or any other musical aptitudes; and most importantly—unlike me—he never imitated anything played on a musical instrument with his own voice. In contrast, this type of useful exercise I often practiced daily even while simply singing for my own enjoyment. He most likely was too demoralized to do so. Moreover, he hardly dared to touch a musical instrument in the first place.

Considering that many people unjustly labeled me as being the only musically *gifted* one in our family, my brother and sister subsequently had to watch other people praising me any time we had visitors come to the house. It wasn't that my talents were any greater than theirs were; I was simply much further along in developing them. For more than a half-century of my teaching music, I have had the unfortunate privilege of witnessing this sort of destructive dynamic in countless families.

But even while my own siblings witnessed others praising me repeatedly, the one thing that neither of them hardly ever saw was how those same people—including our parents—belittled me in private as much (or more) than when they lauded me in public. So despite the communal displays of admiration that tended to be thrown around the living room or in other people's parlors, much of it was done more for show than actually to offer me any real encouragement.

In contrast, each of their endless critiques, sarcastic putdowns, and cloaked (or unveiled) threats were given to me face-to-face, up close, and oftentimes occurring directly *in my face*. And in almost every instance when this type of behavior occurred, the perpetrators of these verbal assaults made certain that no one else was in earshot to hear their relentless ridicule.

There was a lot of jealousy and passive-aggressive competitiveness to which I was subjected—especially from both parents, my maternal grandfather, three of my mother's six siblings, and a few of my cousins. Being the recipient of those types of constant jibes came to

be a source for my own well-practiced insecurities about music as well. Many such angsts took decades for me to overcome.

However, the psychological hurt my brother accrued was totally out in the open. Any time my mother was asked if he were as musical as I was seen to be, she would often laugh aloud and reply tactlessly that he was *tone-deaf*. This she did with great frequency at times, even while her unfortunate, youngest son was in earshot of such conversations.

So it wouldn't take an expert to predict why he normally froze up from fear any time he was asked to sing—even when only our immediate family was present and we all happened to be singing together. After all, his completely untutored attempts should never have been compared with the accomplishments of an amply-trained and *highly-practiced* older sibling. Having no skills nor virtually any positive experience to begin with, there were absolutely no reasons why he should be able to sing in the least. Sad to say, he was never given a fair chance to overcome those deeply ingrained habits lending towards bashfulness or the fear-ridden tendencies that prevented him from developing any vocal potential whatsoever.

Consequently, every time that he made an attempt to sing, he did so quite timidly with no supporting breath. Anyone who lacks good breath control will find it nearly impossible to produce a pleasant sound or stay on pitch. It has nothing to do with either the misconceived notion of being *untalented* or having the mythical affliction of *tone-deafness*.

Without any proper training or encouragement, my brother usually sang flat, frequently couldn't find pitches, and tended to produce a lot of feeble, gravelly sounds. Rather than encouraging him to sing more fully and with greater frequency, my mother persisted in teasing him whenever he attempted the task. (Unfortunately, she often encouraged my sister and me to join in with her mocking jests as well.)

As such activities developed into unconscious habits, she offhandedly would refer to him as having no musical gifts at all. Even while she obviously was oblivious to her comments having a long-lasting, detrimental effect upon her youngest son, she further reinforced the false notion of his being musically talentless by adding:

> Not everybody can sing. It's okay to be tone-deaf.

Consequently, it was only a matter of time before he would stop trying to sing altogether.

Even though I speak of the many unfortunate things that my mother did and said unconsciously to reinforce the idea of my brother's *tone-deafness*, I certainly do not mention

these things now in order to cast blame. How could I? I also became a witless contributor to the problem and tossed out my ample share of teasing in his direction. And he did the same to me for many other reasons—as did my good sister.

A myriad assortment of weedy dysfunctions was inflicted upon and taught to each of us by parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins; and every single one of those contributors to our own foibles and imbalances had already incorporated many problematic dichotomies of other family members in an identical or similar fashion. After all, whatever negative interactions we all engaged in were the unhappy results of never ending practices handed down from father to son, mother to daughter, sibling to sibling, cousin to cousin, and ultimately from generation to generation.[3]

When many people observe artistic abilities, they oftentimes react by reflexively referring to genetic traits without ever considering the essential ingredient in our development and perpetuation of all those abilities: practice. But while the same individuals observe ongoing emotional dysfunctions occurring between individuals in any actual family, the word *genes* usually doesn't crop up during their assessments of the situation.

Although the expression *bad genes* has been blamed for ongoing destructive behavior in the past, nowadays it is more commonly acknowledged that unsavory conduct usually stems from an unhealthy family and/or social (and educational) environment. In other words, the unbalanced aspects of our personalities materialize from those who have damaged us physically, mentally, and emotionally—just as our perpetrators have been injured by their past interactions with family, friends, and teachers and classmates at school.

That being said (in my mother's particular case), she was simply reacting to the deeply ingrained practices that were a part of her ongoing experiences within her parents' household. Putting others down with verbal jabs and degrading comparisons was something that almost everyone she grew up with *practiced* on a regular basis—and not just when it came to music.

This brand of verbal lynch attacks I often experienced first-hand. After all, several of those maternal relations (responsible for doling out such unkind favors) were semi-professional or amateur musicians themselves and seemed to take pleasure in deriding me behind closed

[3] Of course, we each developed our own personal brand of familial dysfunctions by adding not only our own dualistic responses to the hurts and pains put upon us by other family members, but other weedy dysfunctions are also integrated into our personalities while navigating the world outside of the intimate relationships found within bloodlines. After all, dichotomous actions and reactions are practiced with, received from, and passed onto potentially anyone with whom we have ever had contact—even when those who teach us further dysfunctions reach us through media-based *realities* such as movies, news programs, video games, and the like.

doors whenever possible. Jealousy was certainly one of the unconscious dynamics motivating their words and actions. Yet, from where did these noxious responses arise? Naturally, they manifested from hurtful experiences of their own that each of them suffered through while interacting with others in their lives.

However, when these same somewhat callous and insensitive relatives spoke to anyone other than myself, their inclination tended to be the exact opposite of what my own personal interactions with them revealed. Instead of spreading their criticisms of me further afield, they bragged about my abilities and achievements tirelessly to everyone else.

It was emotionally more advantageous to boast about my alleged successes. After all, I am certain that their adulations of my abilities would have had a bolstering effect when it came to quashing their own insecurities and feelings of being put down—being made to feel insecure by other members of the family (or within their other social groups) during days past.

While much of my musical practice developed out of formal training early on, my mother's seemingly innate musical abilities came about from an entirely different form of practice altogether. Although she never studied any kind of music formally, she was exposed to live music daily since she was a baby. Therefore, she couldn't help but imitate what she heard by constantly singing to herself. She sang when she played outdoors. She sang along with her mother and father. When she got older, she sang while she worked; and when she grew up and got married, she sang with her kids, when she was cooking, cleaning, gardening, driving, or even when there was nothing in particular to do at all.

While her father, certain uncles, and some of her own siblings played their instruments, she often sang along, but always from the sidelines. Interestingly enough, she never had the confidence to sing as a member of the family's musical groups, because her father really never gave her the opportunity or encouragement to join in.

Jumbled together with her musical abilities, there were many counterproductive habits that she also practiced inadvertently. One of them just happened to be an insurmountable stage-fright that certainly was fueled by those around her—especially my granddad. It is likely that he didn't want anyone else in the family to overshadow his own abilities, even though he certainly would have never openly admitted this, not even to himself. Yet, at a weak moment, there actually was a rare instance when he inadvertently confessed this to me in so many words.

After all, he was almost always the lead player in everything they would perform, normally had the most impressive solo parts, and was usually treated as the star of the

ensemble. But if my mom had been encouraged properly, I have no doubt that she could have easily outshined him and every other player as well. Unfortunately, no such encouragement was ever forthcoming. Consequently, she remained an unobtrusive bystander instead but continued to pursue her *offstage* solos with deep feeling and versatility in spite of this.

Amid all of the dysfunctional family dynamics, she persisted in making constant vocal adjustments that increased her singing prowess in an understandably arbitrary yet still instinctive fashion. Nevertheless, these ostensible *practices* played a vital role in supporting all that she successfully utilized while singing. Throughout most of her life, these mechanisms became the elements of a reflexive musical routine in which she engaged regularly, though it still was a process that persisted in being both unconscious and unwitting. Regardless, her seemingly innate methodology elicited sizable *jumps* into an otherwise-inexplicable musical *talent*.

She developed the aptitude to adjust pitch, alter tone, adapt expression and feeling to the sounds she became capable of producing effortlessly. From these results sprang the praises of those who heard her. The admiration of others undoubtedly boosted her confidence—which was a vital ingredient needed to spark within her a desire to continue experimenting with her voice.

Additionally, from her self-assuredness (solely while singing outside the family spotlight of course) stemmed a willingness to breathe fully and produce tones decisively. These ingredients gave her the necessary recipe to sing with great energy and feeling all of the beautiful songs that she was inspired to sing off the cuff. Moreover, such unintended performances led random passersby—those who just happened to be in earshot of her *musical soliloquies*—to presume that she must be either a professional singer already or an exceptionally *gifted* individual who should be attempting to pursue a career.

In contrast, my brother also had a substantial degree of practice, but it was of an entirely different nature. Unfortunately (and ultimately), it led to his inability or unwillingness to continue singing at all, thereby thwarting any dormant musical potential rather than awakening it. He unknowingly practiced various negative reactions while being at the receiving end of putdowns and intimidations. Because of having been given virtually no encouragement, he understandably went through periods of wariness and resentment. He occasionally made offhanded remarks revealing his feelings of inferiority. It had to affect many aspects of his life, perhaps even into adulthood.

Although obviously always loving music, it was something he never chose to engage in. By accepting the erroneous verdict cast upon him by others (that he was tone-deaf and musically untalented), he reiterated internally this sort of unproductive, diligently practiced belief without any awareness of doing so.

Fortunately, he was able to redirect his creativity into other art forms. He showed a great aptitude for painting and sculpture early on. Some of the pieces that he produced at a young age reflected an ability and passion of someone many years his senior. Therefore, even as his mindset produced barriers that prevented him from developing musically, simultaneously more constructive practices brought him into a more positive condition when it came to the visual arts.

Every member of our family rehearsed many musical and non-musical skills either helping or hindering our actual abilities and inclinations to sing. Certainly, those functional and dysfunctional processes either benefitted or impeded many other aspects of our lives as well. As in all other families, our practiced, well-nourished thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, subsequent beliefs, and resulting actions hid behind every successful and unsuccessful outcome that manifested. Regrettably, in the case of my younger brother, his underlying practices were not those that would permit him to make a *jump* out of his so-called *tone deafness*.[4]

In fact, it definitely happened in reverse. It was all of the negative practices that actually compelled him to *jump* into a seemingly permanent state of unmusicality. Referring back to the elements of mind gardening, these (and all other) practices are in actuality the unconscious sowing of selected seeds of thought and their derivatives.

[4] Were members of my family (or of any other family) perceived as being musically *gifted* actually more talented than those who had been labeled just the opposite? There has always been an argument about how good our genes have to be to manifest any talent, but I strongly believe there is much more at play than simply having inherited *good genes*. It is conceivable that the evidence to indicate a shift in practices of attitude and developing proper techniques would have produced a much more significant result compared with simply what has been transferred to us by some of our ancestors. In this particular case, and in countless other situations I have witnessed firsthand, it was the inevitable existence of practice in one way or another. Conscious and unconscious practices on many levels were constantly active to manifest each outcome. If my brother had been taken aside and taught the proper skills to correct his counterproductive habits, many of his musical and even nonmusical outcomes would have been totally different.

In other situations, when seemingly *untalented* children were retrained, I have seen many of these students outperform their so-called *talented* siblings. Unfortunately, in some instances where parents weren't also capable of retraining the emotional responses of their *talented* children, those kids who were initially considered to be the most gifted had reactions of jealousy and resentment towards their other siblings' newfound successes. In some cases, they were so angered and threatened by the change in their family's musical *pecking order* that they refused to continue pursuing music on any level. Their well-practiced belief of being the talented one in the family—the gifted one, the brilliant one, the *special* one—was partially formed by additional practiced beliefs. Consciously and unconsciously they exercised the idea that their brothers and sisters were less talented, less gifted, and less special than they were. They were used to putting their siblings down with teasing and taunting remarks. Now, this practice was no longer valid. A new reality shattered the *weedy*, unloving practices that had been implemented oftentimes for years.

Throughout my life as a musician, I frequently observed many students making significant and sudden *jumps* from rudimentary performance levels to much higher ones. Sometimes such transitions seemed to happen almost instantaneously. One of these occasions occurred while I was attending college in the early 1970s.

I had been hired as an assistant to the music director of a large, urban church in an affluent section of Baltimore. My duties were to play the organ for two of the several weekly services and to direct a fifty-voice youth choir. It didn't take long for me to realize that I was given the least desirable of his tasks, those he obviously never wanted for himself in the first place.

One of the ministers who usually officiated at both of the services for which I had to play was terribly old,[5] cranky, and forgetful. I later discovered that my immediate boss—the music director—disliked him immensely. Apparently, that is why he so generously gave me the dubious privilege of working with this particular man instead of keeping those tasks for himself.

Then there was the junior choir! Several parishioners referred unkindly to them as the *tone-deaf kids*. Admittedly, the adult choirs were fine ensembles, but the children's chorus couldn't even sing in two-part harmony. All fifty of them barely muddled through a single melodic line together.

Even though I just referred to their attempts at singing a *single melodic line*, by no means could they ever actually sing in absolute unison at any given moment. On the contrary, they always sang out of tune—incessantly screeching out multiple incorrect pitches simultaneously when only a single note at a time was designated or required. This indicated to me that those who were previously in charge of directing them could apparently conduct adults who already had developed a large number of musical skills but had no understanding of how to teach total beginners the rudiments of singing or of music in general.

Some of these kids could only bashfully whisper notes that were meant to be sung out with a full voice, a similar predicament to that which affected my brother growing up years earlier. Others sounded like they were moaning and whining, and the more confident boys and girls tended to shout out the words without any musical pitch whatsoever; or they simply would just scream. Whenever songs were being allegedly rehearsed or performed by the group, the

[5] Referring to this man as *old* rather than *elderly* is to point out not only that he was beyond the normal age of retirement but—more importantly—that there were a good number of parishioners who thought of him as being too far *over the hill* to still be preaching at the church.

familiar tunes that they tended to sing would be difficult or impossible for anyone to recognize if it weren't for the choir's piano player pounding out melody lines while those poor kids remained in vocal pandemonium. For an idealistic, young musician such as myself, this was nothing other than a musical hell of the highest order.

The first weekend on the job was also the first time I heard this group's calamitous attempts as an actual choir during the final service led by the retiring conductor. I quickly ascertained that my new boss had bamboozled me into taking on this undesirable (if not totally futile) assignment. Being promised a quick advancement to more satisfying work, I had been assured that I would soon be able to direct the adult choirs on occasion and also play organ for services led by the more affable ministers in the church.

However, as anyone might have guessed, those promises were never kept. No other opportunities were ever given to me during the long and painful sixteen months I managed to survive there. I eventually came to realize that because I was successfully handling the most undesirable of all the jobs in the place coordinated by my boss, there was no reason he would give me a chance to do anything that he enjoyed doing himself. After all, there was no one at that church who fell lower on the musical food chain than I did. Consequently, those challenging and hitherto unrewarding responsibilities were mine to keep.

Despite this realization, I tried my best to remain cheerful and enthusiastic. In fact, after I first heard the choir sing in a service (if it could be called *singing*), several important members of the church asked me for my opinion about the group. After I replied with an ambiguously polite remark—attempting to make as neutral and non-committal a reply as I knew how—they all began to laugh. Then they told me that only a few parishioners really wanted those *tone-deaf kids* to continue singing.

Even though my heart sank after first hearing this reference, knowing full well what the designation implied, I ignored their overtly rude remarks by replying with youthful and optimistic cheerfulness:

There is no such thing as tone deafness!

Furthermore, I stated emphatically that they could be singing on pitch and in four-part harmony with only a few rehearsals.

Unbeknownst to me, the news of my naïvely bold pronouncement spread like wildfire among the church ranks. Despite that many would have preferred to see the permanent demise

of their musical anathema, no one dared to make waves over the matter. The junior choir was a well-established tradition, although everyone on the music staff dreaded the possibility of having to be responsible for such an embarrassing and thankless undertaking. Furthermore, throughout the decades before I arrived on the scene, none of the previous directors were able to achieve what I said could be done during a few ninety-minute practices.

As I was beginning my first choir rehearsal with them, several church officers walked into the room along with nearly eighty parents. Fortunately, because of my profuse, youthful optimism—amplified by a teensy dash of hubris—I remained blind to their intentions. Perhaps, a bit of deafness and dumbness remained as well!

Nonetheless, I was somewhat aware that many of these onlookers seemed to be showing signs of having *blood in their eyes and cleavers in their hands*,[6] despite that I actually didn't realize the sole purpose for their attendance was to watch me humiliate myself. Indeed, they expected me to fail miserably.

Likewise, little did I know that one of the ministers was planning to fire me in front of the entire group. Such behavior certainly didn't exemplify anything that could be remotely considered as being *Christian* or *spiritual*, even in the most abstract or remote sense of either of those two words.

I already knew that my newly acquired *choir kids* couldn't stay on pitch while they were supposed to be singing together on one note at a time. Therefore, it was pointless to have them run through any of the songs that they already were supposedly *performing* regularly. No positive changes could be made by simply repeating something they were in the habit of singing incorrectly—if there attempts could be justifiably considered as singing at all.

Instead, I wanted to start them over from scratch. This would allow me to assess in what direction might prove the most effective to proceed. After introducing myself and making a few humorous remarks (to lighten the mood so that they might feel more at ease), I played a single note on the piano and raised my hands to direct them in singing that pitch on cue.

The result was totally predictable and equally dreadful. I heard an audible wave of snickers and guffaws rising out of the *corral* of parents, ministers, and other officials who were obviously anticipating an unavoidable fiasco. Their inability to behave in an appropriately adult

[6] This short quote is from an original poem about music critics and the performances that they appraise. I wrote it as a part of a collection of humorously satirical pieces about musicians, while I was only a young teenager at the time. It would have been appropriate to include the entire piece as a sample here, but all of those poems were destroyed in the flood mentioned earlier in the book.

fashion then triggered a similar and more raucous reaction from the young choir members. After quickly settling the kids down again and then casting an ominous glance in the direction of the onlookers, I finally asked the choir to stand up.

After listening to their moans and grumbles of protest, I jokingly said:

> Okay, lazybones! Vacation's over! Stand up on your feet and no complaints! Ya can't sing when you're all slouched over. No real choir sings with such lousy posture. It doesn't look like you're getting ready to sing at all. Nope, I think you're all takin' a nap!

Then I mocked their appearance by crumbling down on my knees, slumping over my chest, and finally bursting out into a long succession of ridiculously exaggerated snores.

Delighting them with this craziness, everyone roared with laughter. Once I got their attention again, I signaled the kids into silence and played another note on the piano. Immediately, I sang the pitch using my high falsetto so all the girls and prepubescent boys—whose voices hadn't changed yet—could identify and match the pitch more readily.

Then I sang it an octave lower for the other boys whose voices already had begun to mature. As I continued singing on the pitch, I intoned:

> Okay you guys, take a big deep breath; and when I give the signal, I wanna hear a huge, loud, beautiful sound on *ah*.

As soon as I pointed at them to sing, they let out a considerably more robust noise. Granted, the majority of them still were off pitch, but they certainly had improved from their initial attempt. Because a number of them began thinking about the actual tone quality (probably for the first time in their lives), there was nevertheless some improvement to at least that aspect of their sound.

I briefly praised them but also explained how they needed to get even better. Since some of them still were singing too weakly for supporting a stable sound, I cajoled those particular kids into getting louder by standing with even a better posture and breathing more deeply than in their previous attempt.

Once that was accomplished, I knew that the next step would be to show all of them how to locate and execute the required pitch without hesitation, so they actually could perform together in a *genuine* unison.

Therefore, I asked them to take another deep breath and start over once again. Many of

them still couldn't find the note I had played on the piano. So I made a gesture with my hand for them to stop. Then, I quickly began another unexpected drill to continue piquing their interest.

I began singing with a beautiful, rounded sound in my highest falsetto range. Then I suddenly dropped the pitch and *scooped* downward to my lowest, most resonant bass note. While executing this extended glissando,[7] they heard me plunge four octaves in an instant. Some of the kids gasped in disbelief, because they never had heard anyone do that before.

While I was intoning a deep, sonorous note, I began to chant:

This is very low...

And as I did this, I made a huge motion with one of my hands pointing emphatically towards the ground. Then my voice soared upward once again into my upper soprano range. When I reached an exceptionally elevated pitch, I sustained it for several seconds and rang out the resonant words that instantly echoed through the room and down the adjoining hallway:

And this is really high!

Simultaneously, I swept my hand upward, pointing towards an imaginary place on the ceiling.

Then, I insisted that all of them follow me and try it for themselves.[8] Within a few attempts they were scooping upward and downward, working parts of their voices that probably had never been used before. This excited them tremendously so their energy level immediately revved up again. I had to clap my hands and let out a sudden shout to regain their attention.

After that, I praised them for their efforts with this unconventional exercise and then suddenly spoke out in a voice not much above a whisper. Constantly shifting the sound of my words helped them to remain curious and well-focused.

One more time, I quickly played a single note on the piano, raised my hand, and directed them to begin. Immediately they responded. A greater number actually sang on pitch, so I continued to instruct them while they held the note for several seconds more. Telling them that whenever they ran out of air, all they had to do was take another quick, deep breath; and then,

[7] A rapid sliding up or down the musical scale.

[8] The reason for demonstrating high and low notes is that those with inexperienced musical ears actually do not distinguish readily between what is high and what is low (as a pitch) until it is pointed out to them. For those who take music lessons, this skill oftentimes is acquired unconsciously while learning. But even some music students remain *tone deaf* if there is not constant promotion by a teacher, parent, or other form of monitor who encourages and even insists on using the voice while learning any musical instrument.

continue singing.

As this happened, I went around the room listening intently to each of them. While passing those who were on target (sustaining the proper pitch), I smiled, nodded reassuringly, and encouraged them to continue what they were doing. However, as I came across those who were still off-key, I pointed up or down, indicating in what direction they should move their voices so as to locate the desired note.

If their pitch needed raising, I would make a huge motion upward with one hand, or if their sound had to be lowered I would provide them with a sweeping gesture down to the ground—often assisting them by singing the desired changes alongside them. I would point their attempts in the direction of a desired note until they got to the correct place. Once there, I gave them a wink and a smile and went down the aisle to other kids in the group. Within a few minutes, everyone was basically on the proper note and I applauded them with gusto and delight.

Once they were all quiet again, I chose another pitch and asked them to find it while reinforcing their attempt with my same, familiar hand gestures. However, this time I only had to give a few of those signals before all of them were singing *in tune*. With several more attempts, the entire choir was able to match any chosen note relatively well and deliver it on cue.

Once that was accomplished, I had them performing slow, five-note *scales* with a consistently pleasing and resonant sound that they never heard themselves sing before. I would point them in the direction of a desired note until they arrived at it correctly. Throughout the entire process of getting them to move up or down (as they searched for the required note at any given instant), I often mimicked their tone quality and pitch in order that they might produce a better, more accurate, and beautiful sound. Because of this, they found it much easier to identify where their voices were within the musical scale and whether the sound was resonant, buoyant, and beautiful—or harsh, strained, and lacking diaphragmatic support and breath control.[9]

A while later, they began to tackle full eight-note scales in unison and then in two-part

[9] With most choir members, my technique of first imitating any undesirable noises that they were producing at any given moment and then juxtaposing more preferable sounds immediately thereafter (by singing beautiful-sounding alternatives loudly over all of their voices, in order to get them to mimic those more resonant and beautiful sounds) was very successful. However, for shyer individuals, the students who possibly would be overwhelmed or distracted by my copycatting them boisterously, I found it to be more effective to stand directly in front of each of them individually and gently sing into their ears instead. By also utilizing this second approach, they too were able to match the proper pitches in just a few simple attempts.

harmony. Next, we started singing the popular four-part round *Frère Jacques*; and finally, after rehearsing each vocal part several times separately, we finished our session with half of a simple hymn—also sung in four-part harmony. Unsurprisingly, the hymn needed to be practiced a good deal more in upcoming rehearsals, but this was only the first step. None of these things had they ever been able to do before.

How was it accomplished? For the first time, they were taught the underlying, basic skills that are essential for singing properly. Prior to this first session with me, they were given pieces to perform before having the capacity to sing them correctly. They had never been shown the basics needed to navigate any choral piece whatsoever.

No one ever corrected their posture or treated them in a way that would keep them motivated or attentive. They were handed music to read without ever considering whether or not they understood what it actually meant to *read* music in the first place!

After quizzing each kid individually, I discovered that not only were most of them incapable of distinguishing a specific note from any other notes found on a written page, but most of them were embarrassed and intimidated while being forced to pretend that they were actually reading from their songbooks. But realistically, they couldn't possibly know what to do with any written music because most of them had never been shown how to read at all, not even the basics of notation.

Musically speaking, most of them were illiterate! The only ones who had any familiarity in this regard were a few who took private music lessons or played an instrument in their school band.

Nevertheless, each child was expected to read, sing, and harmonize without ever being offered the slightest clue on how to accomplish these things. It was like attempting to operate an express train without ever laying down the tracks beforehand. But in order to accomplish this, the construction crew and their foreman must first know what materials are required and how to assemble them.

Since this group of youngsters had never been given any proper training in how to function as an actual choir, they had been mocked and derided by many members of the church for years, through no fault of their own. Consequently, a lot of them had little confidence or enthusiasm in what they were doing at all. So, even while I was introducing the group to the most rudimentary of skills, I was keenly aware that they also needed immediate injections of confidence and praise—but not for the wrong reasons. In addition, they benefited greatly from

being continually fascinated and challenged so that their curiosity and eagerness to learn could sustain them throughout the drudgery of the repetitive and less interesting portions of each rehearsal.

A continuation of warm-up drills that strengthened their newfound ability to recognize pitches quickly (and locate those pitches vocally) was also vital. They needed someone who could imitate their singing and quickly demonstrate other options that were an obvious improvement. Such a juxtaposition can help students to hear blatant, contrasting differences in sound that they couldn't detect previously because they had never been shown the stark contrasts between terrible sounds that they had been making and beautiful ones they had yet to discover.

Once they were able to identify these distinctions, it became much easier for them to adjust their vocalizations instantly and accurately. Furthermore, they needed to be familiarized with singing in unison. Since they initially couldn't even manage to land their collective voices on a single note, how could they be expected to get through an entire piece with multiple voice parts and ever-changing harmonies? Yet, once they did start to sing in harmony during our first rehearsal together, they then had to learn how to concentrate on their own individual notes so the different pitches being simultaneously sung by others in the group wouldn't confuse or distract them.

Each of these processes had to be introduced using a step-by-step procedure that would provide tangible successes along the way. Could alternative methodologies yield similar, positive results? Of course, the answer is yes. But regardless of the specific approach anyone might use, the closer it comes to being consciously, consistently, correctly, and completely implemented (by utilizing the *Four Cs*), the more likely any desired results can be actuated.

By the end of that first rehearsal, these boys and girls could sing simple scales with rudimentary precision. They did this while maintaining reasonably good pitch; and they were also blending together to make acceptably pleasing, unified sounds while harmonizing in four-parts for the first time ever.

Needless to say, there were several kids who required further assistance studying their vocal parts, employing proper singing techniques, and learning the fundamentals of reading music. Furthermore, the most withdrawn students needed additional confidence building, and it was essential for me to provide them with extra help in a much smaller, more personalized setting.

Therefore, I required about a dozen of them to attend supplementary classes that met in intimate groups of three or four at a time. Within a few short weeks, even those who were struggling in that first session began to sing more assuredly. Indeed, all of them blended relatively well together and each student finally could sing with at least a modest degree of confidence.

This was unquestionably an enormous transformation for all of them. In years past, the weekly rehearsals for the *tone-deaf kids* never seemed to emerge from the cacophonous chaos that awarded them their essentially undeserved nickname. Obviously, they couldn't be accused of being tone deaf any longer.

Did some of these boys and girls *jump* from their seemingly *talentless* state by transforming into functional members of a genuine choir almost immediately? Some of them certainly did. Occasional onlookers were pleasantly surprised when they witnessed such occurrences. But others making these sorts of *jumps* often did so at unexpected moments in my smaller practice groups where there were not so many people around and they found it easier to relax and open up. Nonetheless, the majority of all the students did initiate their most noticeable *jumps* pretty much at the same time within the first few rehearsals while the entire ensemble was present.

It is true that a small percentage of these boys and girls never made *jumps* that were readily detectable to an untrained ear that was simply incapable of noticing such subtle improvements. Instead, most gains came in small, steady increments over time. But in modest ways, the majority of the kids were making miniaturized *jumps* in almost every session.

Regardless, during any ongoing learning routine, *jumps* (from one state of awareness, understanding, and aptitude into another) often occur whether or not they are recognized by others. Yet, despite whatever methods might be used to create such shifts, no lasting changes can take place without considerable comprehension and skill first being developed through the application of appropriate practice. As was stated earlier, veritable conscious gardening requires us to constantly exercise the *Four Cs*.

When we learn to garden the mind consciously, *jumps* will appear to take place with greater frequency, even though these increasingly common occurrences may just be more readily apparent to us due to our increased awareness. They may have already been occurring without the necessary degree of perception needed to detect them previously.

On the other hand, deleterious forms of *jumping* can also occur when we practice without

divine love, oneness, or balance—regardless of the frequency at which we employ our practices. This type of jump always occurs when we continue to nurture duality.

Whether our changes occur from implementing the *Four Cs* in a balanced state or a dualistic counterfeit of the *Four Cs* within any unbalanced and dichotomous condition, there is always one thing that normally takes place beforehand. In both cases, some form of concentrated, repetitive practice had to have been implemented.

Once again, if we consider the above story in terms of a mind gardening metaphor, we can observe the many ways I initially *cleared* or *weeded out* old ideas regarding what this choir rehearsal should actually be. Then I immediately began to sow new seeds in the guise of alternative techniques and approaches that were nurtured, nourished, and *fertilized* with love—although that love had to be cloaked in the guise of enthusiastic praise and encouragement.

Each of these vital ingredients was part of a *mind gardener's approach* to inspire those kids. They acted as warm and earnest incentives for each of those boys and girls to discover and explore a bright, simple path of ongoing hope and fulfillment within an atmosphere of measured exuberance and fun. It allowed them to jump out of and away from their old, degrading persona as the *tone-deaf kids* and immerse them into the wondrous world of becoming an actual *tone-producing choir*.

III.

A bogus bus stop, quieting dementia patients, and monkeys who wash sweet potatoes...

I recently happened upon an interesting radio show called *Radio Lab*. The final portion of that particular episode included interviews with several staff members and the director of a nursing home in Düsseldorf, Germany. Their conversations described a unique method they inadvertently discovered that effectively dealt with patients suffering from various forms of

dementia.

Before coming across this unconventional approach, they had a constant problem with patients wandering away from the premises, frequently dressed only in night garments or other indoor attire. Aside from the likelihood of their getting lost in the middle of a relatively large city while forgetting where they were intending to go, there was also the danger of their experiencing overexposure during the colder months. One man was actually found unconscious from hypothermia.

Patients tended to stray off by themselves while they were re-experiencing events from their past. Occasionally, they would wind up at a house in which they lived years before or imagine that they were on their way back to work. Sometimes, they believed that they had to retrieve their children, meet up with a wife or husband, or pay a visit to other members of the family.

Whenever staff members eventually located their meandering *charges* and asked those patients to come back to the home, the old folks habitually resisted, oftentimes quite violently. They tended to feel an enormous sense of urgency about whatever it was that they were reliving at the moment and regularly refused to believe anything that anyone else might be attempting to explain to them.

Listening to the employees being interviewed on this program, it was apparent to me that these staff members felt great empathy and genuine concern for the wellbeing of those in their care. They equally suffered enormous frustration because there didn't seem to be a solution for keeping patients from going off on their own, at least without causing major disruptions and a great deal of unhappiness for everyone involved.

Eventually, one staff member came to the director proposing an extremely unusual plan. When he first heard it, the director began laughing uncontrollably. Many others also thought it to be a humorously absurd idea, and most people felt that it would be highly unlikely to prove successful.

The notion was to build a bus stop directly in front of their nursing home. However, unlike an ordinary bus stop, this one would only be a prop for patients. No buses would ever pick up or drop off anyone there. Since the *old folks* who wandered outside of the facilities were on urgent, seemingly imaginary quests to travel someplace else, the bench built on that site might be the perfect enticement to keep the patients from drifting further afield. Perhaps they would sit down and wait for a bus to take them off to wherever they thought they needed to go.

After this mock-up had first been built, it didn't seem like the staffer's plan was going to work. At the time, no one was wandering away and the only people who sat on their newly constructed bench were actual passersby. However, it was eventually discovered that a certain female patient went missing again. And when staff members first looked outside for her, she was found waiting patiently at the specially-made bus stop.

One of the nurses immediately went out to meet her; but instead of insisting that she come back inside, this particular nurse simply sat down beside her and they quietly waited for the *bus* together. After some time, the patient forgot why she was sitting there; so rather than telling her that she resided at the home and must come back inside immediately, the nurse simply invited the patient to join her for a cup of tea.

The elderly woman was returned safely to the nursing home with no quarrel or resistance of any kind. It was done quietly, compassionately, and without negating the reality that she temporarily needed to experience. Soon thereafter, the staff members were discovering other patients sitting outside on their newly constructed bench on a regular basis, waiting for a bus to take them off to wherever they thought they should be going at any given moment.

Within a short time, the nursing home environment—normally fraught with constant anxiety and stress—shifted into an oasis of calm. Its transformation was so striking and the method so simple that numerous other establishments quickly adopted this unique model.

Moreover, staff members began changing how they responded to all patients in-house. There were those who didn't wander off of the premises but still wanted to perform tasks that they happened to be currently reliving.

One such case was a man who used to work as a baker. He would promptly rise at three o'clock every morning. Previously, before any relevant policy changes had been implemented at the home, nurses regularly tried to force him back to bed contending that he no longer had to wake up so early. After all, he didn't have to get up to go to his job anymore, because he was retired now and resided permanently at the nursing home.

The results of these assertions were disastrous. This unfortunate older gentleman responded by systematically going into fits of anguish and rage. He felt that he must begin working immediately. No one could convince him to do otherwise. Yet, as soon as the staff simply allowed him to get out of bed and go down to the kitchen and bake, he instantly became perfectly content with the new state of affairs and his spats with night orderlies ended immediately.

Some staff members did raise the question as to whether or not they were lying to patients when they used this unique approach with the bogus *bus stop* and when they also allowed that elderly fellow to continue being a *baker*. Indeed, there were those who felt quite uncomfortable about the situation because of possible moral implications while operating under such a pretext. Nonetheless, the decision was made to continue with this new directive, given that all past approaches caused such tremendous strife for patients and employees alike.

Despite the uncertainty of some as to whether or not this method was completely ethical, I sincerely don't believe that they were misleading the patients in the least. On the contrary, they simply abandoned preconceived notions of what reality should be for each of their charges, discontinued judging them from a subjectively personal perspective, and relinquished procedures of control that proved consistently to be equally ineffective and harmful. Furthermore, they did these things while compassionately allowing patients to play out parts of their former lives that apparently were vital for them to experience at the moment.

By doing this, I am certain that the nurses and other personnel initiated an instantaneous *jump* into a more balanced relationship with all those who were placed under their care. Now each charge could reenact seemingly crucial scenarios from his or her past without judgment, negation, or interference from anyone else. Seemingly, this change of tactics initiated personal *jumps* for both patients and staff alike.

Apparently, the staff members didn't need to understand or experience completely what their charges insisted on reliving periodically; but it did become obvious that those employees' interactions with patients merited changing nonetheless. Innovative approaches and more compassionate responses definitely were in order. This eventually included not to forcefully change or *correct* the beliefs of what each ward was perceiving to be so vivid and real at the time, even when that personal reality lasted for merely a moment.

If we recall our earlier discussion on the ever-changing, illusory nature of space-time, allowing those patients to relive bygone moments and places was perhaps less of a ruse than it would have been by continuing to force our current illusion of space-time upon them—especially when the results obviously caused enormous disruption, anxiety, and an overall unhappiness for everyone concerned. In contrast, when those caregivers compassionately took on their new roles as neutral and detached bystanders (surrendering any preconceived, dualistic notions of honesty and dishonesty, actuality and delusion), they instantly manifested an exceptionally liberating outcome. In fact, this change was so therapeutic, it defied and

transcended any earlier personal and professional biases born upon preconceived notions regarding truth, deception, reality, and fantasy.

Such an adjustment in thought, idea, emotion, intention, belief, and action transformed their situation:

...in the twinkling of an eye.[10]

Indeed, they began the process of actually becoming conscious gardeners. There certainly is no deception in adopting a practice that weeds away the illusions rising out of dualistic interactions, those that prevent the flourishing of balance, oneness, and divine love.

At this point, it is worth mentioning why I referred to the nursing home transformation as something that happened *in the twinkling of an eye*. Although no actual, death-dissolving shifts occurred there (as was depicted in the Biblical passage from which this phrase originated—and described in the attached footnote), the nursing home account still warrants such a description.

If the situation is examined metaphorically, we definitely could consider it as being death-dissolving. After all, there existed an intolerably unhappy, suffocating, and life-sucking state of affairs that instantaneously was altered into something completely renewing and cathartic. This simply is an illustration of what occurs when we effectively practice the divine attributes of genuine mercy and compassion.

In both the nursing home incident and the New Testament pledge, there is an unforeseeable and instantaneous naissance into an alternate condition. It is feasible to perceive these shifts as quantum *jumps*. The mechanism causing these *twinkling-of-an-eye* alterations reveals a portion of our nature existing outside the illusory realm of space-time; and it liberates us from the constraining, dualistic yokes of time, distance, and space.[11]

---

[10] From I Corinthians 15:51–56 in the New Testament:

> Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die [in Greek: *fall asleep*] but we will be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable [throughout this verse, *imperishable* replaces *incorruptible* and *perishable* replaces *corruptible*; *incorruptible* and *corruptible* were used in earlier translations] and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this perishable body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your sting?"

[11] As was mentioned earlier, the *jump* into a different condition doesn't necessarily have to be a non-dualistic shift into an improved condition, but transforms us or our situation into whatever we have been practicing—suddenly and instantly. Although these *twinkling-of-an-eye* shifts certainly have attributes of being transcendental, many other *jumps* certainly do not.

Once released from this so-called reality of questionable confines (even for an instant), a more genuine and truthful state of being is capable of manifesting ostensibly *in the twinkling of an eye*. Naturally, we could also employ any number of other metaphors to describe the indescribability of anything materializing instantaneously into its full physical form. In this regard, such an incident isn't much different from the one about which I mentioned in a previous chapter. It was the time where when I happened to be meditating on a seaside pier as my uncle and I witnessed my corporeal presence being visible in four distinctly separate places all at once. And afterwards, there were conspicuous residues attached to my skin and clothing from each of those nonadjacent locations—even after all other evidence of that preternatural experience had vanished.

As it happens, most of the stories I recounted earlier included some sort of *jumping*. Aren't at least some of these descriptions similar to situations where all of us have had momentary shifts into a more perfect state than that to which we have normally become accustomed? Perhaps, they are mere glimmers of a reawakening into our pervasive—yet long-awaited—paradise that so many of our species have painstakingly eluded throughout the ages.

To emphasize further the integral role that *jumping* plays in thought manifesting into material reality, let us consider when it occurs rapidly and collectively throughout species other than human beings. One such example is described in Shakti Gawain's *Living in the Light* as she speaks about the well-debated *hundredth monkey phenomenon*:

> In Japan in 1952, scientists were studying the behavior of wild monkeys. The principal food of these monkeys was sweet potatoes. One day, they noticed one monkey do something they had never seen before—she washed her potato before she ate it. She repeated this behavior on subsequent days, and soon they noticed several other monkeys washing their potatoes before eating them. More and more monkeys began to do this. Then in 1958, after all monkeys on the island were exhibiting this new behavior, scientists on nearby islands began to report that monkeys on their islands were also beginning to wash their potatoes. There was no physical connection between the islands, and no one had transported any monkeys from one island to another.

Gawain speaks further about this particular *jump* as a leap in collective consciousness. Despite that some have refuted such claims emphatically, an undeniable shift occurred collectively between these particular monkey populations, even while there were no possibilities

whatsoever of any physical interaction between them. Although this is a case that is widely known and considered by some as being somewhat of anomaly, I find it highly unlikely to be simply an exception to the rule. It is most likely that this sort of phenomenon regularly is occurring with everyone and everywhere—regardless of whether or not most of us are aware of it happening. Most of the time, I am certain that group shifts are just too subtle or miniscule to be noticed. And if they do happen to be observed, they presumably are dismissed shortly thereafter or altogether ignored.

In human society, how many times throughout our history have there been moments when in totally different parts of the world nearly identical events were occurring simultaneously? Identical philosophies were evolving, similar inventions were cropping up, and a countless array of other collective, comparable shifts or manifestations transpired synchronously in multiple places—with absolutely no visible connection or contact ever having been made.

Collective consciousness isn't elusive or invisible, nor is it the impossibility that some might deem it to be. For those of us who choose to practice conscious gardening, it is most likely to see how not only everything in existence is interconnected, but that we are all joined exclusively by divine consciousness; and when we speak of said consciousness, we refer to the pervasive awareness that is forever in existence even before we realize our truest nature is simply this consciousness, which is nothing other than divine love.

However, while our seemingly separate selves continue to be muddled within the murky, mesmerizing, malignant, and dis-unifying effects of duality, all of our so-called separations are no more a barrier than those islands were to multiple monkey populations learning from one another how to wash sweet potatoes before eating them. Not even the barrier of formidable seawaters prevented this sequestered behavior from escaping unconsciousness and ultimately passing from monkey to monkey, and from island to island. And if not *in the twinkling of an eye* than definitely in the next most expedient way possible.

I cannot say what sorts of prior practices led to this mass acceleration in improved cognizance, but if we examine any other examples of such shifts that we have experienced personally, have discovered in some research archives, or arbitrarily realized when interacting with others of our own species, it is highly doubtful that there were no such jumps in this primate population at all. Maybe the seemingly sudden insight in that single monkey (due to some sort of prior practices, even if managed merely by an underlying reflex) led her to

somehow identify that water could remove the grit and grime from her vegetables, making them much easier to consume, less difficult to swallow, considerably gentler on teeth and gums when chewing, and most likely more pleasant to taste. In any case (human or otherwise), I believe that the key to true awareness and ultimately to divine consciousness simply is by continually practicing balanced and unifying thought with at least some degree of awareness, and also by subsequently practicing complementary intentions, emotions, beliefs, and actions in a manner conducive to supporting and enhancing that initial line of thought.

Obviously, a collective of monkeys suddenly learning to prewash sweet potatoes isn't necessarily an indication of divine consciousness (or a conscious state of divine love), yet it still might be considered by many to be a form of increased collective awareness. Nevertheless, we should consider that any such group cognizance could possibly be a symptom of or precursor to an actual state of a genuinely conscious perception.

Regardless, it definitely does illustrate that initiating the simple task of washing food (a singular idea initially acted out by one specific monkey, mindfully or accidentally) became a teaching tool from which other monkeys also could learn to manifest comparable results. As new forms of teaching and learning grew and expanded out of this one specific seed of thought, an underlying unfoldment subsequently took place as an altered behavior *jumping* not only from monkey to monkey in close proximity (those who could observe with their eyes), but to those on other islands who seemed to be *observing* and *imitating* (for lack of better words) within their shared *collective mind*. Or—as certain physicists might observe—the sudden improvement in these communal eating habits occurred through an interaction on a *non-local* level of experience.

And from a more spiritual perspective, this so-called non-locality may simply be when the monkey's relevant thoughts penetrated through Maya's veil into that subtle sea of infinite possibility I have referred to as *the divine within*, where all illusory times, spaces, and their measurable and immeasurable distances cannot exist.

IV.

How outgrowth from thought materializes...

Before discussing in more detail useful methods of conscious gardening, it would be beneficial to introduce—by way of the garden metaphor mentioned throughout—various stages of how thought develops and *ripens* into material manifestations. Initially, all thoughts behave like random seeds. They are omnipresent. They exist all around us, within us, forever.

Thoughts are not unlike spores arising from certain types of flowering plants. For example, bright and sunny dandelion blossoms transform into tightly-packed, seed-filled bouquets. These floods of feathery-white flecks find themselves released into the air and float aimlessly above us. Finally, after losing all momentum, they drift downward and settle silently into an unsuspecting earth below.

A similar *settling* also occurs with thought seeds that continuously project themselves across the unwavering mental screen within each of us in guise of images, sounds, feelings, words, seeming sensations, and the like—either exacting or nondescript, or a combination of both. During every moment of every day, we are engulfed in this internally generated *movie* of random thoughts. We regularly witness many of these omnipresent germs without giving them even an iota of acknowledgment or recognition.

But if we focus or fixate upon any of their kind, we begin the process of seeding our mind's fertile soil. Being engaged with just a single, random thought can trigger the conscious (or unconscious) beginning of a mentally induced planting of that particular seed along with possible others. Once we have repeatedly given recognition to even a single random thought, it can suddenly become our own.

This newly personalized seed is then fertilized when it is affected by our myriad emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions already having been generated and practiced—and with any additional thoughts that we may also have been harboring at the time. Consequently, each of our *chosen* and newly *planted* thoughts are augmented and amplified by these incessantly energizing and nourishing forms of reinforcement and attention. When such thought-seeds are taken on with full awareness (an attribute of conscious gardening), we then are capable of tending to them in a state of balance, oneness, and divine love.

But if those same thoughts are allowed to germinate while we remain unconscious of their doing so, the dormant condition of duality will undoubtedly awaken and take hold. Our unconscious planting of any dualistic seed occurs in a state where we rightfully cannot consider ourselves to be bona fide gardeners. Instead, as stated previously, we exist merely as the blossoms of weeds continuing to disperse more seeds of our own dualistic kind.

Any focus we might give towards one or another of those thoughts we have just *planted* can also develop into our ongoing affirmations, repetitions, and practices involving the further expansion of said thoughts. And such changes proceed because of dormant potentials awakening within the core of every thought—regardless of whether the thought in question has been nurtured in the mind of an individual or in the collective mind of some particular group:

…always having the capacity to mature and the potential to manifest fully…

While these thought-seeds are being cast upon our mental soil, they can begin germinating into ideas. (For purposes of this discourse, an idea is simply a collection of specifically-formulated thoughts derived from numerous random and/or personally generated ones.) Once the transformation into ideas has been started, we aid in their growth and ultimate manifestation within physical reality by superimposing additional ideas and other random or deliberately selected thoughts upon them. In other words, we begin the growing process by providing them with mental nourishment.

By sequentially administering the following ideas to fertilize any initially-chosen thought or idea, those upon which we have specifically focused our attention, their patterns of growth and fruition will often accelerate. We might consider calling each idea we superimpose simply as our *mental manure*—if we choose to engage with yet another garden metaphor.

However, not all of the ideas outlined here are automatically required for any particular materialization. Neither do they necessarily need to be employed in a specific order. But understanding the potency and effectiveness of utilizing such a collection of potent and *nutritionally enhancing* ideas is essential for becoming a conscious gardener[12]:

[12] Please keep in mind that everything categorized or organized into the lists included throughout this work is done so to provide a more precise sense of the relevant topics and ideas being discussed. Nevertheless, it doesn't imply that every listing has to be familiarized so specifically as to be necessarily learned by heart. Obviously, there is no harm in doing so; but our individual progress can also be accomplished by absorbing these ideas gradually as they continue to pop up in our lives directly. That was certainly the way most of them came to me in the first place. I definitely didn't spend dedicated amounts of time concocting these lists all in one shot. Equally, I never made a concerted effort to formally memorize them

1. *To* **imagine***, conceive, visualize, or dream*
2. *To* **invoke***, petition, pray, or appeal*
3. *To* **inquire***, question, ask, or examine*
4. *To* **need***, want, desire, or require*
5. *To* **choose***, decide, select, or begin*
6. *To* **do***, assemble, organize, or construct*
7. *To* **affirm***, repeat, practice, or replicate*
8. *To* **persevere***, persist, be determined, or have resolve*
9. *To* **accept***, recognize, perceive, or acknowledge*
10. *To* **hope***, have faith, expect, or wish*
11. *To* **believe***, trust, be certain, or have confidence*
12. *To* **surrender***, release, let go, or liberate*
13. *To* **rejoice***, celebrate, revel, or delight*
14. *To* **command***, declare, direct, or instruct*
15. *To* **thank***, be grateful, appreciate, or cherish*
16. *To* **praise***, congratulate, honor, or respect*
17. *To* **manifest***, create, reveal, or harvest*

When we administer any succession of ideas repeatedly upon any of our chosen thoughts, such a progression is capable of developing those particular thoughts further into a multitude of other ideas—including those of emotion, intention, belief, and action. Moreover, they eventually can mature into actual intentions, emotions, beliefs, and actions at any given time. Additional growth of each idea can materialize even into situations, circumstances, conditions, objects, and beings. Remember that we are constantly superimposing these types of ideas with countless other thoughts and ideas either consciously or unconsciously, consistently or inconsistently, correctly or incorrectly, and completely or incompletely.

The above list is but one of an infinite number of sequences that contain ideas capable of accelerating the blossoming of additional thoughts and even more selected ideas into physical reality. I chose this particular group because it can readily be used in conscious gardening.

---

afterwards.

Instead, most of these details came to me eventually over time. In fact, I often didn't realize their true significance for years. Essentially, I found that the most important thing was to learn each of them without any sense of urgency, worry, or impatience. When trying to *force* ourselves into remembering all such things at once, the outcome can oftentimes be yet another unintended duality emerging: a seesaw of impatience versus patience, or a feeling of desperation not being able to learn things instantly versus having a sense of hope that everything will be understood inherently in its own time.

Of course, when we are decidedly bent on studying (even so much as to memorize, yet in an unforced manner), then there can be great benefit in doing so as well.

Applying such a sequence of ideas regularly to any of our dearest dreams and intentions will produce the same beneficial effects that potent fertilizers have upon every seedling planted in our physical gardens found out-of-doors. Additionally, when those ideas are practiced while utilizing the *Four Cs*, miraculous and beneficial outcomes are more likely to ensue. In contrast, if we employ said *fertilizing* thoughts without the use of the *Four Cs* (in other words, without divine love), they still may accelerate towards manifesting outcomes in the material world; but instead, they most definitely will form dichotomous weeds exclusively.

Throughout the ages, there have been alchemists, mathematicians, inventors, scientists, saints, prophets, spiritual philosophers, and other visionaries who have readily used similar sequences of ideas for manifesting new technologies, revolutionary scientific approaches, the deliverance of souls, and the enlightenment of beings. Some of these thinkers, dreamers, and prophets could be considered as being conscious gardeners, while the remainder of these idealists may be nothing more than unconscious proliferators of more dualistic weeds.

For example, more than seven hundred years ago, Saint Thomas of Aquinas[13] suggested a concise formula for actuating the divine deliverance of every human being. To paraphrase his simple directive with a more contemporary phraseology, I submit that our redemption comes when we truly know what to believe, what to desire, and what to do.[14] Within this simple pronouncement, Aquinas readily employed three essential words that are also found in the aforementioned list of ideas: to **believe** , to **desire**, and to **do**. When each of these thoughts mature even into the most subtle, non-physical, internal *actions*, then the first steps are being taken towards the manifestation of any thought into the seemingly more tangible world of matter.

His use of the infinitive *to know* affirms a true awareness (or consciousness) concerning the interior procedures of *believing* and *desiring*. Additionally, the idea of knowing what we ought to *do* is nothing more than an affirmation for undertaking a totally tangible and concrete act—or simply to take action. These are vital, unquestionable components for ultimately bridging the gap between all thought and our seemingly palpable existence.

When we harbor negative thoughts like those found in the upcoming list offered below,

---

[13] *Tommaso d'Aquino* was an Italian scholastic philosopher and Roman Catholic theologian of the 13th century. Born in either 1224 or 1225, he also was known to many as the *Angelic Doctor*.

[14] The actual translation of the Aquinas quote is as follows:

> Three things are necessary for the salvation of man: to know what he ought to believe, to know what he ought to desire, and to know what he ought to do.

such a practice tends to yield only duality—even while constructive, compassionate ideas might be affirmed and demonstrated simultaneously. Despite their obviously destructive potential, these negative ideas also possess the ability to produce seemingly positive outcomes because of their inherently dualistic nature. How much and how long we practice ideas, and whether or not we continually infuse divine love throughout (in the guise of utilizing the *Four Cs*), will have a bearing on what might possibly materialize eventually. This occurs regardless of whether we are applying ideas from any positive list or from any list resembling this particular one:

1. *To* **fear***, panic, dread, or be upset*
2. *To* **worry***, fret, be anxious, or be disquieted*
3. *To* **envy***, resent, be jealous, or be greedy*
4. *To* **procrastinate***, delay, dally, or put off*
5. *To* **judge***, condemn, disparage, or be critical*
6. *To* **manipulate***, control, scheme, or connive*
7. *To* **injure***, harm, damage, or impair*
8. *To* **deceive***, betray, mislead, or lie*
9. *To* **swindle***, cheat, defraud, or exploit*
10. *To* **intimidate***, frighten, bully, or coerce*
11. *To* **thieve***, steal, pilfer, or seize*
12. *To* **attack***, harass, strike, or assail*
13. *To* **retaliate***, avenge, requite, or take revenge*
14. *To* **annoy***, spite, offend, or be disrespectful*
15. *To* **hate***, dislike, despise, or loathe*

Let us now reexamine the first list in further detail and consider how we regularly use such sequences of ideas on a daily basis.[15] Perhaps, we become aware of a thought or idea because it interests, fascinates, beguiles, troubles, displeases, or even angers us; so we begin to ***examine*** it mentally. While doing this, we also might start to ***imagine***, ***dream***, ***visualize***,

[15] In the next several paragraphs, ideas (first listed on page 495) are italicized here in bold print for easy reference. Some of them will not be reintroduced in same order that they appeared initially. This change is meant to emphasize and demonstrate that when we practice manifesting any particular thought, successive ideas that are then superimposed upon the thought in question to develop it further can change from instance to instance. Also, many ideas will often be reapplied at other various points in the sequence.

It is always important to keep in mind that (like with all sequential processes we might happen to perceive, when examining the development of thought into matter) no one should ever obsess over the specific order of each instance when we do notice an idea recurring—thinking it is imperative to always have such categorizations committed to memory—but rather to simply accept each appearance within the sequence as being part of an ongoing confirmation of their collectively essential existence in whatever order they all might happen to appear.

or ***conceive*** more aspects of such a thought.

Even when individuals (or groups) are not consciously aware of the potency of the aforesaid lists of ideas, they oftentimes come to realize how important at least some of these tend to be when it comes to manifesting various aspects of their own lives. As was indicated earlier, Albert Einstein took his ***dreams*** very seriously and allegedly discovered the theory of relativity in one such nightly occurrence. Along those same lines, he also greatly valued his ability to ***imagine***:

> I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination encircles the world.[16]

Although I suppose that it wasn't his intention to do so, Einstein compares the difference between knowledge and the ***imagination*** as if he were reflecting upon the shortcomings of knowledge found within the thin veil of our dualistic existence within *Maya*, while he emphasized the ability to ***imagine*** being if not limitless then certainly much more than mere knowledge alone. When he speaks of ***imagination's*** capacity to *encircle the world*, it is as though he innately knew imagination emanated from a source that was boundless while pervading the limited confines of the globe. ***Imagination*** surely inhabits the realm that I described earlier as the *divine within*.

This is most assuredly the source from where all ***imagining*** stems.

Aside from our abilities and willingness to ***imagine***, ***dream***, ***visualize***, and ***conceive***, we also might ***ask*** ourselves relevant or irrelevant ***questions*** pertaining to it. And as every creative mind has discovered throughout the ages, in order to allow our most treasured ideas to manifest, it is first essential to ***ask*** about and ***question*** everything possible concerning those ideas.

If we are focusing on a thought that is already part of a deep ***desire***, ***need***, urgency, or emergency, we instead might ***invoke*** assistance from within ourselves. We also could ***ask*** help from others, ***pray*** to the divine, ***petition*** the aid of saints and angels, or even make an ***appeal*** for the intervention of countless dualistic forces that either might seem benign or malevolent.

---

[16] This quote was taken from an article in the *Saturday Evening Post*, October 26, 1929. The piece was entitled, "What Life Means to Einstein: An Interview by George Sylvester Viereck".

These influences do not necessarily have to do with any alleged entities or beings. We can ***invoke*** the potent powers of love or hate, reconciliation or retribution, kindness or anger, honesty or deception, confidence, worry, conviction, fear, generosity, avarice, and a multitude of other such dynamic energies. They might stem from our own individual thoughts, our group thoughts, and/or a selection of random thoughts that were only just detected or recently generated.

If there were no needs or desires initially, after we ***inquire*** about and possibly ***examine*** the thought(s) in question, we might develop a ***need*** or ***desire*** from our repeated deliberations. As we continue to ***require*** and ***want*** this notion to ***manifest*** in our lives, we might ***choose***, ***decide***, ***select***, or ***begin imagining*** more detailed offshoots of our ***desired*** chosen thought. We may also start to perceive how we might transform that thought into something we presumably must ***do***, ***assemble***, ***organize***, or ***construct***.

While continuing to ***affirm***, ***repeat***, ***practice***, or ***replicate*** its countless details, such a process can progress and evolve further with ***perseverance***, ***persistence***, ***determination***, and ***resolve***. These types of focuses instill within us the ability to keep on going and never giving up.

We can cultivate this list of ideas mentally (concerning our selected thought), but we also may develop emotions surrounding these endeavors. We form intentions that strengthen our commitment to the thought at hand. We establish ***belief*** regarding our thought, whether that belief is dualistically positive, negative, or non-dualistically compassionate and balanced. Any conscious or unconscious ***repetitions*** of these processes can develop into physical action and activity. The more we ***practice*** our thought on all of these levels, the more likely it will transform into an actual objective or goal.

If we do not resign from this procedure prematurely, by pursuing other thoughts and ideas instead, our conscious ***practice*** and ***repetition*** can make our objective of actual materialization truly seem plausible. We then are able to ***accept***, ***recognize***, ***perceive***, and ***acknowledge*** it as a real possibility in our lives. At this point, all of our ***practices*** are likely to evolve into a state of genuine ***hope***; and with newfound ***hope***, any ***wishes*** or ***expectations*** are more readily ***anticipated*** and truly ***believed***.

As the capacity to ***believe*** grows stronger, ***certainty***, ***trust***, and ***faith*** also may increase. However, if our ***belief*** becomes excessive, obsessive, or imbalanced in any way, it oftentimes is essential for us to ***surrender*** all ***expectations***. Such a release frequently will

allow our thought to ***manifest*** fully. This idea of ***surrender*** has been summed up most aptly by the following simple statement I first heard of decades ago:

Let go and let God…

By ***surrendering***, we ***let go of*** or ***relinquish*** dualistic interferences such as fear, worry, lack of confidence, overconfidence, infallibility, carelessness, and all aspects of ego and control.

The removal of these dichotomous influences can lead to a ***liberation*** that also might be required at other points in this sequential process, so it often is necessary to ***surrender*** more than once during the procedure. I should mention here that any actual ***relinquishing*** may be misconstrued or misinterpreted as defeat. However, veritable ***surrender*** simply is a total yielding of the dualistic aspects of all practice, so the true nature of our chosen thought may blossom as divine love.

After genuine ***surrender*** is accomplished, a sense of joy and even relief frequently ensues. To ***rejoice***, ***celebrate***, ***revel***, or ***delight*** in our chosen idea allows us to abandon conflicting anxieties and develop even a stronger and more balanced ***faith*** and ***belief*** in what we choose to manifest. As ***belief*** deepens once again, confidence to ***command***,[17] ***declare***, ***direct***, or ***instruct*** anyone or anything (regarding the idea we have chosen to manifest) also may increase. While we sense the inevitability of our selected thought materializing, the ideas of ***thanks***, ***gratitude***, ***appreciation***, or ***cherishing*** can further accelerate the growth process—as can our choice to ***praise***, ***congratulate***, ***honor***, or offer ***respect*** to anyone or anything we believe has aided us in the development of that specific thought.

The actuality of ***manifesting***, ***creating***, ***revealing***, or ***harvesting*** thought into our physical existence often occurs after we repeatedly fertilize that thought by acting upon it with many or all of the above-mentioned sequential ideas. Yet, such a materialization might occur only after applying any number of additional ideas—superimposed either specifically (with purpose), or randomly (with a sense of irrelevance).

It should be emphasized that underlying, unrelated, or supplemental thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions—reinforcing our chosen thought—also can either

[17] Those of us who follow one of the many spiritual traditions alive in our world today, usually think that *commanding* is something left solely for God to do. In the Bible alone, there nevertheless are numerous instances that indicate when the opposite also is true. One of my favorite examples is when Moses—out of love, faith, and devotion—commanded the seas to part. Through this powerful thought that blossomed into action, he manifested the escape of his people who had been enslaved by the Egyptians. Regardless of whether we believe this to be an actual historical event or simply a myth, it still points out an important and necessary fertilizing process to manifest new blossoms in the physical realm.

accelerate or prolong the time required for actuating it into something tangible.

It is true that any of the above ideas can be practiced solely as internalized thought. However, in order to strengthen each of our chosen thoughts so they will definitely grow from mere potential into a fully-realized manifestation, they should also be practiced consciously with discernable emotion, intention, belief, and action.

In a variety of circumstances, casting our thoughts into physical reality may seem to occur instantaneously. The unexpected immediacy of certain situations might be considered as inexplicable, coincidental, or even miraculous. Albeit, countless forms of continuous, subliminal practices always occur before such a split-second materialization can possibly transpire.

Regardless, our ostensibly omnipresent barriers of time, distance, and space—the dualistic trinity of weeds which humanity has nourished and affirmed throughout history—incessantly fabricate illusions of inconsistent delays. Consequently, any manifestation of our thoughts may appear to take minutes, hours, days, months, years, lifetimes, generations, or even aeons. Yet, after we have successfully practiced eliminating such weeds in at least one of a variety of ways, these chosen thoughts can suddenly appear to *jump* effortlessly into existence even *in the twinkling of an eye*.

But because countless, unobtrusive *jumps* continually arise during our lives, we normally take them for granted. In fact, we are so used to their presence that most of us never become aware of their existence. It is partially for this reason that most people are incapable of recognizing the actual conversion of practiced thought (through their seemingly unrelated *jumps*) into manifest reality.

Although there are countless instances when these frequently unnoticed jumps occur, one common example can be found after we have practiced a particular task over and over again—never seeming to get it right. Then, after abandoning the pursuit for a while, we come back to attempt it once again and suddenly can perform it flawlessly, as if by magic.

In the early part of the twentieth century, the great pianist Josef Hoffman[18] was frequently asked how much he practiced daily. It was purported that his reply went something like this:

> I do ninety percent of my practice on walks in the woods.

Notwithstanding, he spent a substantial number of hours each day working at the

[18] A Polish American pianist (1876–1957) who was also a composer, music instructor, and inventor.

keyboard and was considered by many to be the greatest virtuoso of his generation. But what he wanted to convey to his students who frequently asked him this question was that although most of his actual worktime was spent while sitting in front of his instrument, it was within the solitude of nature where he regularly discovered how to improve upon and perfect his expressiveness, physical technique, and overall musical interpretations (and these he accomplished with nothing other than thought). Without those various thought-seeds constantly working in the background, he felt that his musical abilities would never have culminated into such a unique and powerful component of musical artistry. I was told that his time alone in the woods was oftentimes highly emotional, inspired, and inspiring.

Perhaps one of the most effective fertilizers to be found in the mind garden—which readily accelerates the growth process of thought manifesting into the physical realm—is what I refer to as *emotionalized thought*. This particular breed of thought simply is one that represents, embodies, induces, or produces specific emotion or emotions. Such a phenomenon is utilized by many professional athletic coaches while they work with their teams. Countless orchestral and choral conductors consistently employ *emotionalized thought* while they convey musical direction to their respective groups. Ballet and opera coaches also are known to do the same.

They coordinate and facilitate vastly complex physical, mental, emotional, and even spiritual interactions and reactions between conductor and performers, performers and other performers, performers and audience, and conductor and audience. When this process is executed properly, it can change an otherwise unremarkable experience into a manifestation of something truly transcendental and life-changing for participants and observers alike.

Success coaches instruct their students on how to *emotionalize* or *fertilize* specifically selected thoughts (regularly masquerading as career ambitions and life goals). They do this while teaching the process of visualizing and affirming those objectives. Upon such intentions, consciously induced feelings of excitement, enthusiasm, conviction, fulfillment, and success are superimposed.

Often starting with a mere thought or idea, students are encouraged to imagine specific life achievements that they wish to manifest. Then they are urged to do so while psyching themselves into a state of heightened, positive emotion. They are also encouraged to practice producing this condition regularly. Typically, such a routine is carried out on a daily basis for achieving the most suitable outcomes.

The notion of manifesting our reality from thoughts—those that we initiate and practice—

is frequently taught by these types of *coaches*. Years ago, I recall watching a video-recorded interview where one world-renowned trainer casually mentioned that he normally received a seven-figure hourly fee for private sessions. In more precise terms, he was being paid several hundred dollars per second whenever he gave personal tutoring to anyone.

A rate like that for any service might be deemed by many people as being ridiculous and unimaginable. Yet, to such a reaction, this particular trainer probably would remark that because those incredulous individuals couldn't find his fee to be believable, they could never manifest anything like it for themselves. In other words, if there is no practiced ***desire***, ***affirmation***, ***acceptance***, ***hope***, or ***belief***, then a desirable and lasting transformation is wholly unlikely, especially if we consider that almost everyone else who participates in group thought with us would also be practicing regularly the impossibility of such a fee.

Aside from heads of state and CEOs of international corporations, national sports teams also are among those who have hired him for private coaching sessions. We must assume that major team owners and all other paid leaders never would be able to retain their jobs (nor their reputations) if they doled out that kind of cash to anyone unless such a service yielded maximum returns.

Another instance where *emotionalized thoughts* are used regularly is during certain phases of military training, although the objectives for doing so are definitely unlike those employed in the applications mentioned above. Extreme physical, mental, and emotional demands constantly are being put upon the trainees. The yelling and screaming of insults, put-downs, threats, and other forms of verbal intimidation have been used to break through all resistance of will against authority.

Such an indoctrination process is designed to produce soldiers quickly out of ordinary kids and young adults. Trainees promptly must learn to obey their commanding officers without question. They suddenly must be capable of surviving the most unimaginably terrifying and life-threatening situations, to be able to label and target other human beings as enemies, and to kill those so-called enemies without hesitation in order not to be killed themselves.

Instead of using an emotionally upbeat psych as success coaches employ, military trainers might purposefully demoralize trainees (breaking away at earlier foundations of personality, behavior, and values), while molding their charges into something other than what they were before training commenced. Well-indoctrinated social habits and ethical beliefs, many that have been thoroughly practiced and adhered to since an early age, must be subordinated,

subverted, or even replaced. New ideals and principles are planted that almost always are diametrically opposed to those practiced before entering the military.

Other instances utilizing the *emotionalization of thought* include all forms of brainwashing techniques, including those used by cult leaders (for dramatically altering the beliefs of both staunch devotees and potential followers—to convince the unsuspecting and the naive oftentimes into doing their self-serving and nefarious biddings, no matter how irrational or destructive such directives might be). Likewise, there are also those instances instigated by organizations and agencies dedicated to exposing their audiences to an endless stream of propagandized messaging and disinformation.

When distorted and/or completely false portrayals of what is supposed to be factual are *emotionalized* by packing them with fear-inducing, suspicion-mongering, and rage-provoking imagery, the initiators of such artifice can easily brainwash their audiences into opposing intellectually—and even acting out against—anyone who would interfere with their covert schemes. Normally, these agendas are nothing other than a means for the initiators of such techniques to satiate their lust for power, control, and greed.

And then there's outright torture. This is an insidious tool that instills dramatic alterations on many levels within each subject, but also continues perpetuating an endless stream of *emotionalized thoughts* long after the actual torture has ended, many times drastically affecting the victims of such persecution for years afterwards and can even seriously hinder or permanently prevent an individual's return to any semblance of normalcy thereafter.

Regardless of the extreme uses mentioned above, all *emotionalization* has the potential for facilitating and accelerating the growth of any targeted thoughts while they approach some manner of physical manifestation, thereby making these elements truly potent fertilizers in the materialization of thought into the physical world—regardless of whether they are founded in divine love or any number of the countless dualities that regularly confront us.

In both positive and negative ways, this includes literally every type of teaching and/or learning situation, even those that occur subliminally during seemingly uneventful moments during our daily, mundane activities. However, as was emphasized earlier, their ultimate potency and effectiveness also depend upon the underlying thoughts and ideas that are also being practiced simultaneously, regardless of whether those hidden practices are undertaken in a witting or unwitting manner.

Whether or not we utilize emotionalized thought as a *fertilizer* to facilitate and accelerate

any outcome we are hoping will manifest (as was mentioned earlier), repetition is always a key element of our required practice. And in terms of utilizing practice as a tool of conscious gardening, it is vital for us to examine ourselves persistently—so as to continuously incorporate the *Four Cs* within every aspect of that practice.

However, when the repetition in practice becomes meaningless and mechanical, random distractions that may induce counterproductive, unconscious, and opposing practices can undermine and even undo the actual, intended outcome of our ongoing routine. It always has the potential of shifting from a conscious and truly compassionate endeavor to one that bounces back and forth from good to bad, right to wrong, and inspiring to dull on that bumpy seesaw of duality.

In an introductory portion of a Pimsleur Language Course that I was using years ago, the following snippet addresses this type of repetition while languages are being learned:

> …[previous] language courses were based on the principle of mindless repetition. Teachers drummed words into the students' minds over and over, as if there were grooves in the mind that could be worn deeper and deeper with repetition. Neurophysiologists tell us, however, that on the contrary, simple and unchallenging repetition has a hypnotic (even dulling) effect on the learning process. Eventually, the words being repeated will lose their meaning…[19]

Therefore, instead of teaching a practice that leads to the induction of tedium, this course (among others) was allegedly designed to create a process of repetition requiring constant choices, ongoing assessments, and ready responses that keep the learning routine interesting and alive. Consequently, any resultant *emotionalized thoughts* are more apt to include those such as excitement, enthusiasm, fulfillment, and even joy. These emotions can more readily act as fertilizers—which will tend to yield results more beneficial and effective—than those stemming from emotionless monotony or boredom.

Through the ages, inexplicable and miraculous rescues, healings, and other transformational experiences regularly have arisen amid natural disasters, tragic accidents, mortal illnesses, wars, and other life-threatening situations. While viewing pertinent television

[19] Although this introductory passage from the Pimsleur language course does have some of the characteristics of a sales pitch, it nonetheless brings up an important element about effective practice.

interviews and documentaries, reading historical accounts on the subject, and speaking to those who have survived these kinds of episodes, I have been able to surmise that several types of *emotionalized thought* regularly are implemented by victims, onlookers, and close relations to those who were directly involved. Amazing occurrences often took place soon after certain intensely *emotionalized thoughts* had been applied to some of the ideas that also just happened to be included in the first list of ideas introduced earlier in this chapter.[20]

Initially, a common reaction in dire situations is a frantic cry or ***appeal*** for help. Fear, shock, and horror tend to be among the preliminary emotions injected into thoughts and ideas of supplication. The notion of ***asking*** or crying out for help is heightened exponentially by passionate outpourings of emotion. When no aid appears soon thereafter, desperation and even rage often emerge.

Some individuals experience a moment or extended phase of exceptional clarity that can guide them towards unseen and sometimes-extraordinary solutions to their seemingly unrecoverable situation. Such insights may be considered as the answers to ***prayers*** and ***petitions*** offered.

But as time drifts on, sorrow and despair oftentimes surfaces while physical and emotional exhaustion also ensue. When each situation looks as though it is completely hopeless, a ***surrender*** of all former expectations frequently triggers an unanticipated serenity within. It never seems uncommon for these stages to recur more than once.

A period of quiet self-examination might follow, even flashbacks of one's entire life, along with ***appeals*** to God or loved-ones for forgiveness of any wrongdoing or injuries that were inflicted previously. Bargains might be sought or simply deep and loving farewells made. No matter how each of these situations unfold, there are always sequences of transformational thoughts and ideas practiced by every participant; and at least some of those notions are highly emotionalized.

It might be argued that these sequences also could have been used by many who were not saved, by those who were doomed to die. Nevertheless, each outcome manifests not only from what is practiced during all corresponding crises, but also from how the then-current choices related to, interacted with, affected, and were affected by the moment-to-moment practices transpiring throughout the lifetimes of all who were involved. These practices include

[20] The following four paragraphs include numerous italicized words that are written in bold print. Once again, each of these words can be found in that first list of ideas introduced on page 495.

every personal and collective thought, idea, emotion, intention, belief, and action ever to be implemented. That being said, it would be well to revisit the basic Buddhist axiom that was quoted in the second chapter of this book:

You are everything you have ever thought.

With this in mind, we might find it useful to reflect upon anyone's destructive thoughts and how—when they are emotionalized—certainly can *fertilize* and subsequently lead to disastrous or fatal outcomes. Uncontrolled panic, terror, wrath, vengeance, or hate can extinguish any earlier possibility for a hopeful and constructive conclusion, unless some sort of intervention (either external or internal) breaks such potentially perilous practices. When intervention actually does occur, we should consider that such a manifestation also arises from individually or collectively practiced beliefs, as well as other forms of nurtured thought. A few such thoughts would include those that develop and reinforce the ideas of faith, hope, and the possibility of miraculous intervention itself.

Yet, even in the most grievous circumstances, regardless of any spontaneously generated emotionalized thoughts such as horror and rage, the apparent inevitability of death doesn't necessarily have to be tragic or destructive for those of us who actually do *pass away*. Healing attributes of divine love may blossom and manifest merely seconds before death takes place or even at the precise instant of breathing our final breath.

Aside from these eleventh-hour epiphanies, all previous practices of compassion can also aid in propelling us beyond mortality and oblivion. This sort of preparation has the ability to trigger *jumps* across the abyss of mortal demise into increasingly genuine and conscious states of being. Through such transformational shifts, our past practices offer us opportunities to remove further the dualistic weeds of transient life and passing away.

Although not transpiring precisely within the actual, final moments of life, a late-blossoming revelation nonetheless occurred to my father during the last three months of his seven tormented decades of living. When I was only eleven, he became brain damaged and semi-paralyzed (from an essential but extremely risky brain surgery), and he also remained that way for nearly forty years until his death in late 2001.

Initially, the doctors told my mother that if the operation were successful, he might survive another ten years at most. Though more realistically, they felt that he had even a much briefer time left to live.

However, those well-meaning physicians had no idea about whom they were speaking. My father was one of the most stubborn and determined people I have ever known. There were more than a few times when I heard my mother yell at him:

Why do you have to be so darned pigheaded?

An early example of this immense willfulness, a characteristic that he nurtured throughout his entire life, was brought to my attention by my grandmother, two uncles, and also by my father himself. Each of them relayed the story to me during my teenage years, although at separate times. Yet, in every case the tale remained exactly the same.

While my dad struggled through his adolescence, he had been teased and bullied ruthlessly in school because of his bright red hair. These torments continued to plague him while working on factory assembly lines after running away from home in his early teens. In my own life, I also experienced similar ridicule for the same reason; but such discrimination had lessened somewhat from his generation to my own. Although I occasionally was knocked around, laughed at, and regularly teased, kids never beat me to a pulp or stuck my head in a toilet while having the filthy water flushed over me continuously. However, these things apparently happened to my father on numerous occasions, even after he dropped out of school.

Those constant taunts and harassments affected him so profoundly that he fervently prayed for his hair to turn dark. Remarkably, only the hair on his head soon became almost jet black without any added coloring or dyes. Nevertheless, his body hair amazingly remained reddish until his final days. Even after his hairline started to recede in his mid-twenties, every hair that persisted on the top of his head continued to be black—that is to say, until it gradually faded into greyish and whitened tones as old age set in.

When I readdressed this topic with my father on his seventy-second birthday, he briefly described how brutal those experiences were before his seemingly self-willed *makeover* took place. In other words, our discussions gave me numerous clues about how he unwittingly had fertilized his intentions with deeply *emotionalized thought*.

During his lifetime, he had come close to passing away at several critical junctures. In fact, while he lay on various hospital deathbeds, itinerant Catholic priests offered him the Last Rites of the Church on several different occasions.[21] I often thought that there was something

[21] According to *Merriam Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary*, last rites (or *extreme unction*) is:

incredibly redundant about this conclusive ritual being served to him so many times over the years!

After his most serious accident and subsequent surgeries—which paralyzed him from his early thirties onward—he was forced to endure multiple years of grueling physical and vocational therapy. After being seriously brain-damaged from that life-threatening yet unavoidable operation, he no longer could speak and was barely able to move while lying in bed. It took decades for him to regain a mere fraction of all that he had lost both mentally and physically; and there seemed to be no way of relieving the incessant emotional devastation from which he never fully recovered. At least, he wasn't able to do so until the end of his life.

Psychotherapy was still widely perceived as a social stigma at the time, so it wasn't considered to be a valid or essential part of my father's rehabilitation. Neither was it seen as something necessary for the rest of our family to engage in as well. The doctors definitely didn't press the issue (not even by suggesting any possible benefits), and there was only one nurse who hinted at its being useful at all.

Consequently, because of his perpetually bottled-up anger, hurt, and dread, he occasionally vented those repressed feelings upon his wife and frequently blew up at his children out of sheer frustration and torment. Aside from the enormous trauma he held inside of himself from this tragic event, I also cannot deny the ongoing battles raging inside of him for countless years before that particular disaster struck.

Yet, over the many decades constituting his lifetime, most of his hurt was internalized and he came to a point where any type of outward expression became minimal, or at times non-existent. Virtually all emotional responses were completely suppressed. There were long periods when his brief vocal utterances were limited to momentary, highly emotionalized eruptions filled with criticisms, complaints, and intimidations. As much damage as he blindly inflicted upon his beloved family, I cannot even begin to appraise how much ongoing injury and torment was being either relived or newly generated silently and invisibly within himself.

However, a couple of months before his death, he was able to release an immeasurable amount of pain and disappointment that had remained with him for the greater slice of his seven decades spent here on earth. As I mentioned earlier in the book, a few hours after my

---

...a sacrament in which a priest anoints and prays for the recovery and salvation of a critically ill or injured person.

In years past, priests regularly would be available to those in hospitals who were about to die and would offer them one last opportunity to join the Catholic church, thereby guarantying them deliverance into a blessed afterlife.

mother's passing he made an enormous and sudden *jump* into grace. Although totally grief-stricken, he spoke to me unexpectedly in a manner that I could only describe as being uncharacteristically lucid and even miraculous.

Instead of venting his bottled-up hurt and rage (as was his usual tendency), he expressed himself in a remarkably loving and articulate manner. Despite his ongoing inability to communicate much at all since that fateful accident and ensuing surgery transpiring decades earlier, he suddenly spoke to me with coherence and compassion unlike anything he had ever demonstrated previously.

For most of my life, almost every conversation with my father never lasted more than a few minutes at a time; so listening to him speak for over two hours with luminous clarity and peace was indeed a revelation. His face glowed with rare happiness as he spoke thankfully for all of the true blessings of his life. Even as he awaited his wife's upcoming funeral, he nonetheless was transfigured by this state of profound joy. In a sense, it could have been my mother's death that initiated his unexpected passage into untimely surrender. He was finally able to relinquish decades of pain and suffering in an instant no greater than *the twinkling of an eye*.

In no way before had he ever expressed verbally such an awareness and empathy for everyone whom he loved and who also loved him. And this was especially true for those of us who bore the brunt of his frequent outbursts of unchecked emotion. During my entire lifetime, I only heard him apologize twice before and never openly expressed any remorse for hurts that he inflicted upon me personally. So when he finally asked for my forgiveness at that exceptionally rare and wondrous moment, the entire room where we sat together suddenly was lit ablaze with an irresistible light.

Simultaneously, he exuded traits of uncharacteristic knowing and inner radiance that ultimately extinguished the unrelenting hellfires of his own grief and pain. If there were ever a veritable last rite offered to him, I believe that he received it then with his entire being. Obviously, no priests were present to administer a tangible sacrament, but divine love definitely broke loose from the unintended fettering that yoked his injured soul for decades, almost as though a rare and beautiful bird had been healed and ultimately freed to fly away from a lifetime of unwarranted bondage.

This sudden shift into a truly compassionate state became more apparent with every word that he spoke. His musings were issued forth with an exceptional clarity hitherto

unexpressed. As an endless array of consciously crafted thoughts were being articulated across one virtually unpracticed tongue, he finally was able to unleash his own unique expressions of tenderness and compassion back into the world. Blessed warmth filled his final, closing hours of life with radiant rays of love emanating from within. They readily anointed both of us and did so with inexorable grace.

Admittedly, there would naturally be a few more difficult moments coming to challenge him between this exceptional leap into sublimation and his final wishes whispered just before passing away about three-and-a-half months later. I nevertheless witnessed an enduring change that remained with him until the end, despite momentary relapses into his familiar, well-practiced habits of a tragically dualistic life.

Whether we are contemplating my father's dramatic choice to *jump* out of suffering into the sacred state that finally liberated him, any of the other stories recounted within these pages (or all of the amazing shifts that occur within each earthly individual's own personal experiences), it is important to remember that which I have affirmed more than once before:

> *Each thought and idea we sow—fertilized with further thoughts, successive ideas, and an endless array of accompanying emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions—are at the root of every materialization in existence. Only when we realize this can we begin to function purposefully and effectively as conscious gardeners.*

V.

Carts before horses...[22]

In the film *Under the Tuscan Sun*, author Frances Mayes goes off on an unexpected excursion to Italy.[23] Two of her closest friends present her with a first-class ticket to Tuscany shortly after she had suffered through a devastating divorce.

Once arriving there, Frances soon finds herself unexpectedly purchasing a centuries-old villa that is in a state of serious disrepair. Her sudden compulsion to take up residence in an unfamiliar country while neither knowing any of its inhabitants nor its language is immediately followed by her experiencing acute pangs of what she declared as being *buyer's remorse*.

In the presence of her realtor and newfound friend Signor Martini, she bursts into an emotional outpouring of persistent hopes and fears. Indeed, why had she bought such a big house with no one else in her life to fill all of its rooms? It is true that she wants love again, a family, a wedding in that house, and to hear the laughter of children wafting through its halls. But none of these things seem plausible then. She wonders if it was madness to leave San Francisco and invest everything she had for a life that didn't yet exist. Enormous doubts rise up from within as she confides in him.

After listening sympathetically to her pleas, Martini tenderly imparts the following few words:

> Signora, between Austria and Italy, there is a section of the Alps called the Semmering. It is an impossibly steep, very high part of the mountains. They built a train track over these Alps to connect Vienna and Venice. They built these tracks before there was a train in

---

[22] According to *Wikipedia*:

> The expression *cart before the horse* is an idiom or proverb used to suggest something is done contrary to a conventional or culturally expected order or relationship. A *cart* is a vehicle which is ordinarily pulled by a horse, so to put the *cart before the horse* is an analogy for doing things in the wrong order.

However, from my own observations and experiences, rather than being in the *wrong order*, I would suggest that a more accurate description might be to say: in an unexpected or unconventional order.

[23] A film released in 2003, *Under the Tuscan Sun* was based on the 1996 memoirs of author Frances Mayes. The story was adapted for film and subsequently directed by Audrey Wells. The cast included Diane Lane, Sandra Oh, Lindsey Duncan, and Vincent Riotta.

> existence that could make the trip. They built it because they knew someday the train would come…

The remainder of this autobiographical account of Frances Mayes' arrival in Tuscany speaks of how countless personal dreams and aspirations unfolded miraculously into being—despite the numerous trials she faced initially.

While Signor Martini spoke of a train track being laid so that a new type of train could eventually be built and make its way over impassible terrain through the heart of the Alps, a similar message was also offered in another popular film produced more than a decade earlier. However, unlike the fundamentally factual nature of *Under the Tuscan Sun*, *Field of Dreams* is presumably a work of total fiction.[24]

In this previous cinematic piece, the main character is an Iowa farmer named Ray Kinsella. One day, a mysterious voice speaks to him while he is out in his fields tending the corn. But that voice continues to *revisit* him periodically while chanting the same curious message:

> If you build it, he will come.

As these words begin to preoccupy his every waking moment, he also starts seeing visions of a legendary baseball player from his youth who also happened to be the hero of his long-departed father. Although, initially puzzled by such odd phenomena, he is finally able to reach a conclusion about each of these happenings, although his own suppositions seem equally peculiar to him as well. He assumes that if he digs up his corn and builds a baseball diamond in its stead, then that star player from bygone days would come again to play in his newly constructed *dream-field*.

In each of the aforementioned screenplays, there is a common ingredient present in both of them. The two stories involve at least one individual with the conviction of doing something that would definitely seem irrational to a majority of people. But were they really irrational decisions at all?

Oftentimes, the things that are the most powerful and transformational ideas we ever had, decisions we made, or actions we took also happened to be choices that originally gave

[24] W.P. Kinsella's award-winning story behind the 1989 film *Field of Dreams* was adapted to the screen by director Phil Alden Robinson. It originally was published as a novel entitled *Shoeless Joe* in 1982. The cast for *Field of Dreams* included Kevin Costner, Amy Madigan, James Earl Jones, Ray Liotta, and Burt Lancaster.

the impression of being illogical, impractical, careless, or even totally nuts! Despite their appearance, were they not just times when we followed a singular dream—alive with the thoughts and ideas that were stimulated by underlying and conceivably guiding instincts, inspirations, and aspirations? Regardless of what anyone might have judged these things to be, our so-called impossible dreams (when we dared to act upon them) frequently materialized into wondrous outcomes in the end.

When the radical idea to connect Venice and Vienna with an Alpine railway was first proposed—even while being still technologically unfeasible to do so at the time—it is almost certain that there were those officials who rejected the idea of spending the vast sums of money needed for such an undertaking while also having to recruit and oversee an equally huge and diverse reserve of human resources as well. For some, to build a set of railroad tracks through one of the steepest and most treacherous landscapes in Europe without having a train in existence capable of navigating the hazardous terrain certainly would seem as an impossibility. In our dualistic world, negative reactions to this sort of visionary thinking is quite the norm.

Likewise, there are those who might think it equally ridiculous for Frances Mayes to have bought that ancient, dilapidated villa for a life she didn't actually have yet; and finally, most of the people in Ray Kinsella's town thought that he was absolutely mad for plowing under his corn just to satisfy an apparently crazy impulse, especially since he was about to lose his entire farm to the bank for defaulting on mortgage payments. Everyone knew that he ripped out of the ground a considerable portion of his livelihood. Did he throw it all away just to create three useless bases and one five-sided rubber slab for a home plate?

Quite frankly, we might be asking ourselves right about now:

What does all of this have to do with the mind garden?

Taken together, if we consider the initial proposal for funding a railway system across a decidedly impenetrable landscape, Frances' yearning to purchase an ostensible money pit halfway around the world, and Ray's voices, visions, and yearnings to dredge a baseball park out of his cash crop, they most likely would be deemed as being totally impractical or eccentric at best. Otherwise, each of them also could be condemned as being inflicted with outright insanity.

However, from a mind gardener's point of view, their actions might also be seen as nothing more than sowing the seeds of love-impregnated thought—tiny, intangible granules of

devotion containing the most impossible of dreams. Yet, it doesn't matter whether or not those thoughts appear to be unachievable or realistic, ludicrous or ingenious. What truly matters is the fact that these individuals expressed their simple yet personally unique thoughts and began taking action upon them with a firm and passionate commitment.

Once those tracks had been funded so they were actually being built, when Frances spent most of her money in acquiring that property and hiring workers to assist her in nothing less than a formidable renovation, and as Ray, his wife Annie, and their young daughter all worked together to transform their farm into a ballpark in the middle of nowhere, everyone involved in each of these projects was essentially beginning to assume the roles of veritable gardeners—persisting in the tasks of cultivating, nourishing, and enhancing those thought seeds as each one grew into full-fledged manifestations.

The fact that all of these instances may not have been necessarily based on actual events, it doesn't really matter. On the contrary, they nevertheless provide an excellent roadmap for all of us to harness and carry out a single, provocative thought, hope, or dream in an unrelentingly ardent and exceptional way and guide it to grow into a tangible conclusion. I am certain that at least some of those who read this now have already experienced in their own lives something akin to what is being illustrated here.

When the first train successfully crossed over those formidable Alpine tracks, when Frances found a family to love and laugh with inside the walls of her remarkable home in Tuscany, and when Ray's hopes unfolded into miraculous outcomes far beyond the directives given to him by otherworldly voices and visions, what was it that actually began to happen in each of these examples? It was nothing other than the process of seeding their original thoughts, tending to those thoughts while they gestated and grew, and then finally witnessing those thoughts mature into fragrant blossoms and harvestable fruit. In every instance, a virtual field of dreams gave birth to palpable worlds filled with even further, more blessed, and veritably more unlikely likelihoods.

In my own life, there have been countless occasions when I was compelled to prepare for things that didn't seem likely to happen, yet they most certainly did. Occasionally, there are moments prompting each of us to act and feel as though some profound imaginings are already a tangible part of our lives, even while they still don't readily appear to exist. Nevertheless, we are compelled to advance in the direction where their possibilities seem to be in the process of materializing or are fully formed already.

Whenever divine love emerges from within the deepest recesses of our being as an enormous wave, pulling us into the irresistible and undeniable undertows of what seems to be *impossible possibilities*, we might be pleasantly surprised of their subsequently wondrous outcomes if we dare to follow the course laid out by our hearts rather than succumbing to all of those supposedly pragmatic voices condemning us for wanting to do so. This is something we should definitely consider while wrestling with the endless rationalizations put upon us.

After all, there are countless incessant voices of so-called *logic* teeming all around us (and within us as well). They consist of both the biased and judgmental proclamations of those affecting us in the outer world and equally our own internal naggings filled with hesitancy and fear.

It is at those times when rather we should fly high upon our loftiest aspirations instead of waiting for evidence to support those countless preconceived judgments of others and of our own lesser voices. In any case, the question we should be asking ourselves always remains the same in all such instances:

> *Have we practiced believing in our dream's possibility long enough (and fervently enough) to provoke us into making a whole-hearted plunge upon the unknown depths of our own unlimited potential?*

While we shape an unwavering belief out of intangible or seemingly futile imaginings, amazing materializations (of what would otherwise remain in a state of fruitless *nonexistence*) often can and will unfold as a bright, grace-filled reality. They can most definitely happen simply by our mustering up enough courage to ignore emphatically any doomsday prediction of naysayers, then put a bold cart of our dreams lovingly before that proverbial horse, and finally watch in joyous wonderment while the fragrant mind garden reveals itself within every fiber of our yearnings and those dreams of the heart unfold miraculously (yet prophetically) all around us.

VI.

And faith before the fact...

Later in this chapter,[25] I will tell the story of a farmer who has just planted his cornfield. After endless hours of arduous labor, he came back into the house for supper and matter-of-factly declared to his wife:

The corn's in!

At the time, there was no concrete evidence that anything would essentially grow in those fields. But we could presume to say there indeed were both corn seeds sown and ostensible seeds of hope that (in time) would yield an abundant harvest.

Obviously, no traces of the actual corn could be detected yet. The farmer's crop still remained dormant and inaccessible—not just within the hidden seeds well scattered under the lush soil of his fields, but also as intangible seeds of imagination embedded within an equally fertile loam of faith. Anyone who understands how to grow things out-of-doors would admit that a period of dormancy or gestation is required after the *corn's in* and before any evidence of a harvestable crop could actually be seen.

However, in contrast to corn, when we are instead cultivating thoughts into hopes, dreams, beliefs, and then continuing to foster them until ultimately maturing into tangible reality, there still tends to be considerable doubt and disbelief about whether or not (and how) the growing process actually transforms thought into matter. This skepticism is especially prevalent during the lag time similar to that which occurred for the farmer's corn seeds right up until their newly forming sprouts emerged outward from beneath the soil's surface.

While dreams are still fresh, exciting, and newborn in our minds, everyone is inclined to be captivated enough by them to believe that all things are possible. Even from one simple hope, we can envision its prospects to be nothing less than limitless. However, once our daily humdrum routine inevitably takes hold of us once again (as it usually does), countless misgivings, distrust, and an overall cynicism have the tendency of developing as well.

[25] This pertains to Section X of Chapter 4: *Shielding our dreams as newly planted seeds and guiding them to fulfillment*.

Once those opposing thoughts and feelings start to pop up—oftentimes, when we least expect them to do so—they immediately begin undermining our enthusiasm. They harass us with endless internal dialogues (sometimes cleverly disguising their dualistic emanations by speaking to us through a seemingly wise and personalized solo vocalization) expressing criticisms and excuses why working towards the fulfillment of our dreams is a total waste of time. They also activate in our thinking process something much more diabolical.

They introduce dualistic *opposition-thoughts* that are counterproductive to growing and supporting our veritable hopes. In other words, these interior pests are simply an assortment of weeds also sprouting up. And if left unchecked, such undermining forces will overrun and destroy all of our unrealized aspirations before they have a chance to take hold and blossom fully into the material world.

I am convinced that each of us has heard at least some of the infinite pretexts and disparagements originating from both the piercing voices harassing us within our own personalized thoughts alongside those toxic criticisms spoken aloud already infesting the collective thoughts of others. All such shared directives amplify themselves through the loud, external reproaches offered to us by family members, friends, business colleagues, and even strangers on the street.

Here is just a small sampling of the internal or external ridicule we might hear from one instance to another:

1. *You'll never succeed!*
2. *You're expecting something that isn't possible!*
3. *You don't have what it takes!*
4. *You're crazy!*
5. *You've gone too far!*
6. *You don't have the talent!*
7. *You just don't have the right mindset!*
8. *You're not motivated enough!*
9. *You lack the proper skills!*
10. *You don't have the confidence to succeed!*
11. *You never follow through on anything!*
12. *You're not good enough!*
13. *You're not smart enough!*
14. *You're not strong enough!*

15. *You're not quick enough!*
16. *You're too tall!*
17. *You're too short!*
18. *You're just too skinny!*
19. *You're too darn heavy!*
20. *You weren't born with the right genes!*
21. *You're totally unmotivated!*
22. *You're letting your imagination get carried away with itself!*
23. *Your just a hopeless dreamer!*
24. *It's too expensive!*
25. *You don't have the money!*
26. *It's too dangerous!*
27. *It's a dumb idea!*
28. *It'll take too long!*
29. *There's no way you can pull this off!*
30. *There's not enough time.*
31. *Don't you think that you're overreaching?*
32. *What will people think?*
33. *No one will agree with what you're about to do!*
34. *Nobody will buy what you're selling!*
35. *What can a loser like you hope to accomplish?*
36. *Enough with the pipe dreams!*
37. *How are you going to support yourself while you're doing this?*
38. *Anyone else could do a better job than you!*
39. *What's the point?*
40. *What makes you so special that you should be allowed to do this?*
41. *It's been tried before and no one's ever succeeded!*
42. *Why on earth would you want to do that?*
43. *What were you thinking?*
44. *Are you kidding me?*
45. *Excuse me for laughing out loud!*
46. *Don't be ridiculous!*
47. *There's no point in doing that!*
48. *It's a dead end!*
49. *It's hopeless!*

50. It'll never work!

51. [or flatly replying with a sarcastic sigh of doubt and disbelief] We'll see…

There always seems to be a sizable constituency of either internal or external *critics* and *naysayers* who conveniently appear (at the drop of a hat) ready to dissuade us from following through and materializing our most beloved, inspired, and inspiring aspirations. Consistently, these cynical influences are exceedingly eager to find fault with whatever we are attempting to achieve. Equally, such cynical detractors regularly condemn the idea that any of our hopes and dreams can ever manifest tangibly. But what all of them fail to admit is that their own criticisms, ridicule, and opposing beliefs are also the seeds of a more toxic reality just waiting to manifest instead of our heartfelt, compassionately conceived dreams.

The persistent voices bellowing about in our own heads or those gushing out of the mouths of others through insistent niggling and disapproval, grow ironically into physical manifestations as well. They constantly weaken, challenge, poison, and ultimately destroy the potentiality of our veritable hopes for the future. Such harmful opponents are the weeds that threaten the existence of any deep and precious yearning we may be attempting to foster. Predictably—as if they were the weeds in our backyard flower garden—can and will spread across the entirety of our lives, changing the course of our lives, alter how we interact with and react to all subsequent events facing us, and possibly effect the more wide-reaching manifestations that occur across infinite expanses within the entire mind garden itself.

When we think about how unlikely it can seem at times for thoughts to create a single, material object—let alone the entirety of the physical universe—it would be beneficial for us to bear in mind that there was a time in antiquity when the same incredulity must have been generally expressed about the tiny seeds produced by countless forms of plant life found in forests, jungles, sierras, plains, and even the deserts. How could such insignificant specks grow into vegetables, fruits, or grains? Before the discovery of agriculture, it is important to recollect the time when human beings knew nothing about eating large, sustaining fruits and vegetables that first came into being from a nearly invisible seed.

It also would be useful to recall the observations of physicist Lisa Randall quoted in Chapter 1:

> …COBE [NASA's Cosmic Background Explorer] discovered the quantum fluctuations that were generated when the Universe was roughly the size of a grain of sand, and which are

> ultimately the origin of you, me, galaxies, and all the structure in the Universe. These initial cosmological inhomogeneities were generated when inflation was ending. They started on miniscule-length scales but were stretched by the expansion of the Universe to sizes where they could seed galaxies and all other measurable structure….

This reflects how the sum of physical creation virtually took its ever-expanding form from one exceptionally miniscule *seed* of potential.

Another mention from Chapter 1 that would be pertinent to reflect upon now is what Jeffrey Satinover expressed concerning the actual appearance and behavior of material structure:

> …At the subcellular level, matter itself actually looks and behaves (in the words of one physicist) "more like thought" than like the cogs of a machine.

Although these observations are not universally accepted as conclusive evidence that our physical universe was ostensibly seeded from a kernel far smaller than those that are used in the planting of a cornfield, and that the root of all things material resemble how thought performs and appears, it nevertheless can bring us one step closer to understand the truest nature of our lives as being veritable components of the mind garden.

If any of us still find the idea of our thoughts shaping the world in which we live to be an absurdity, it is essential to remember now once again (and repeatedly hereafter) the time in antiquity when planting a seed in order to eat food must have seemed equally impossible. But through the course of ages, collective thinking, and a nearly universal belief in this concept have become so well practiced and so pervasively accepted an idea that many of us currently take the entire process for granted. There are very few individuals in today's world who would even give it a second thought. (In other words, many of us take the process of manifesting fruits and vegetables from seeds on faith, a pervasive *faith* which always has come before the actual *fact* of any harvest being able to occur.)

As we persist in the development and readjustment of our beliefs about ourselves and the cosmos, and actually start to personify those beliefs that we continue to practice regularly, a noticeable shift (or jump) in our perception will occur. We also will start to truly understand how every thought we think and every word we utter creates our tangible reality. Or, to iterate once again what author and journalist Krista Tippett so rightfully suggested:

Words make worlds…

Throughout our lengthy and diverse history, how many times have members of humanity primed themselves for creating or accomplishing things that haven't yet materialized and then acted upon them as if they already existed? Oftentimes, those who behaved in such an unconventional manner were subject to ridicule, humiliation, isolation, and even banishment. Yet how many times have their mortal dreams, passions, and insights been transformed into measurable reality—even though those potential manifestations may have taken years, decades, or centuries to be actually realized?

Poets, prophets, recluses, saints, science fiction writers, corporate gurus, economists, financiers, scientists, mathematicians, inventors, military commanders, engineers, philosophers, potentates, paupers, and priests all have foreseen, dreamt of, written about, designed, sponsored, prophesied, or decreed countless manifestations (both human-made and naturally occurring) that were thought of as absolute absurdity, fallacy, or completely impossible to achieve. Nonetheless, well-practiced and persistent hopes, dreams, beliefs, and actions eventually ushered those aspirations into existence, even when they oftentimes were unconsciously and unintentionally instilled.

As was said before, in addition to the thinking of thoughts generated by separate individuals from every walk of life, group thinking throughout the ages has also been found to be enormously effective (even more so than with mere individuals) in fulfilling the specific goal of materializing thoughts and ideas. In more recent days, within every branch of science, industry, technology, government, education, medicine, and sports (in addition to a wide variety of other organized collectives), collaborative thought is used extensively for manifesting even the most complex and seemingly unachievable objectives and ambitions in record times.

That is why educational institutions, corporate bodies, national governments, international cooperatives, and various other types of organizations invest so much money in research and development. Think tanks evolved for the very purpose of communally investigating and advancing hitherto unattainable goals, and they now exist in nearly every region on earth.

Undeniably, the most far-reaching and all-encompassing tool for the universal dissemination of thought at lightning speed is the Internet. The affirming of a single idea now can be achieved by millions (and even billions) of people almost instantaneously for better or

for worse. As each generation of individual students and researchers studies the beliefs, motivations, enterprises, philosophies, and aspirations of those alive in other historical periods (and/or diverse cultures and civilizations spanning across the globe), what actually has been transpiring for decades now is an endless engagement in collaborative thinking across the illusory bounds of space, time, and their distances—hitherto perceived as insurmountable obstacles of separation.

Aside from secular applications of group thought, there also is the age-old exercising of collaborative thinking found in religious rituals and group worship. Various forms of communal affirmations have been used in virtually all religious beliefs to assist in the manifestation of various outcomes.

One example can be found in musical sections of the early Christian Mass.[26] Numerous variants have arisen throughout the centuries and in different offshoots of the church. However, let us now briefly explore the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Credo*, *Sanctus*, *Benedictus* (continuation of the *Sanctus*), and *Agnus Dei*. They all incite several of the ideas incorporated in one of the previously-mentioned lists—ideas which tend to accelerate the manifestation of thought into material reality.[27]

Whether sung, spoken, or chanted, the text of the *Kyrie* merely is an idea formed as a prayer that requests, ***asks***,[28] or supplicates. The words are brief and succinct, and in English they state:

> Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.

Initially, the *Gloria* was one word sung over and over again in a series of melismatic[29] musical phrases. It could be considered as a repetitive mantra of ***praise*** to God and Christ

[26] I chose to mention only the musical forms of the mass here because of my own familiarity with them and because of their powerful effect upon many worshippers. These emotional reactions repeatedly were apparent to me while I was music director of several church music programs during my younger years.

[27] The ideas mentioned here—which are also listed on page 495—are highlighted in bold italics as was done previously. Additionally, there are several other similar ideas specified above that are not highlighted, but also have attributes of speeding up the materialization process of thought into manifest reality.

[28] As before, I continue to highlight words in bold italics that can be found in the list of ideas mentioned on page 495. They are just some ideas that can help to advance our thoughts towards manifesting fully.

[29] According to *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, a melisma is:

> …an ornamental phrase of several notes sung to one syllable of text.

simply chanting the word *Glory*. During the Middle Ages, tropes[30] were employed to embellish this brief text. The following is one of the traditional interpolated versions of the *Gloria* translated into English that also introduces the ideas of joy, ***celebration***, and supplication simultaneously to the initial thought of praise:

> Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will. We praise You, we bless You, we adore You, we glorify You, we give thanks to You for Your great glory, Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God the Father. Lord Jesus Christ, only begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; You who take away the sins of the world, hear our prayers. Who sits at the right hand of the Father, have mercy upon us. For You are the only Holy One, the only Lord, the only Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father, Amen.

The *Credo*[31] (I believe) is a lengthy affirmation of conviction and ***faith***. The *Sanctus* (Holy, Holy, Holy) offers ***praise*** to the holiness and sanctity of the Trinity. The *Benedictus* (Blessed) continues that ***praise*** of the *Sanctus* while sanctifying those who come in the name of the triune Lord; and the *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God) is an ***affirmation*** of and an ***appeal*** to Christ's mercy.

Other ritualized group thoughts are practiced by reciting creeds and intoning (or focusing silently upon) mantras.[32] Aside from the *Credo* (Nicene Creed) mentioned above, there are thousands of other creeds used in Christianity. They also are found in other religions. The following quote from *Wikipedia* elaborates further:

> A creed is a statement of belief, in particular a statement of faith that describes the beliefs

---

[30] According to *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary*, a trope is:

> …a phrase or verse added as an embellishment or interpolation to the sung parts of the Mass in the Middle Ages.

[31] The Credo usually employs all or part of the text of the Nicene Creed. According to *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, the Nicene Creed is:

> …a formal statement of the chief tenets of Christian belief, adopted by the first Nicene Council [or] a later creed of closely similar form (Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed or Constantinopolitan Creed) referred, perhaps erroneously, to the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381), received universally in the Eastern Church and, with an addition introduced in the 6th century A.D., accepted generally throughout western Christendom [1560–70].

[32] According to *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, a mantra is:

> …a word or formula, as from the Veda [in Hinduism], chanted or sung as an incantation or prayer.

Mantras are practiced alone by individuals or collectively in groups and are oftentimes uttered as a sacred enhancement to various meditational practices.

shared by a religious community. Religious creeds are not intended to be comprehensive, but to be a summary of core beliefs. The term *creed* can also refer to a person's political or social beliefs, or is sometimes used to mean religious affiliation.

One of the most widely used creeds in Christianity is the Nicene Creed, first formulated in AD 325 at the First Council of Nicaea. It was based on Christian understanding of the Canonical Gospels, the letters of the New Testament and to a lesser extent the Old Testament. Affirmation of this creed, which describes the Trinity, is generally taken as a fundamental test of orthodoxy for most Christian denominations. The Apostles' Creed is also broadly accepted. Some Christian denominations and other groups have rejected the authority of those creeds.

Muslims declare the *shahada*, or testimony: "I bear witness that there is no god but (the One) God (Allah), and I bear witness that Muhammad is God's messenger."

Whether Judaism is creedal has been a point of some controversy. Although some say Judaism is non-creedal in nature, others say it recognizes a single creed, the *Shema Yisrael*, which begins: "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one."

In a 2014 radio broadcast of the weekly program *On Being*, the late Dr. Jaroslav Pelikan[33] was interviewed. He tells of a unifying experience that reciting the Nicene Creed automatically invokes. It nevertheless warrants re-emphasizing here that any type of perceived coalescence either can be a dualistic amalgamation or the presence of true oneness. As always, this depends whether or not our thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions are founded and nurtured within divine love:

> …the singing of the creed is a very important and cherished way of indicating a universality of the [Christian] faith across not only space, but time. To know that in the Philippines this morning this was the creed that was recited at mass and to know that the Emperor Justinian in the sixth century and Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth, and my late father and grandfather all affirmed this….

All ritualized group thoughts and the words that express them have been sung, chanted,

[33] Historian, author, history professor at Yale University for forty years.

or recited throughout the centuries an inestimable number of times and have been affirmed (and practiced) with underlying faith or doubt, joy or resentment, hope or hopelessness, enthusiasm or boredom. They have been pronounced and intoned with devotion, love, arrogance, pride, fear, anguish, and an infinite array of conscious and unconscious thought—the seeds of duality or oneness. And when they have been utilized by those with deep faith and conviction, there have been countless reports of life-altering transformations and miraculous outcomes manifesting after persistent recitations of such liturgies.[34]

Another important form of practiced group thought is found in the popular sayings or expressions of any region, culture, or historic period. Unlike creeds and the various sections of the Mass, they normally are not religious in nature. Neither are they inclined to be ritualized, at least not with any conscious intention. However, these types of expressions tend to be dualistic in nature. Even when such thoughts are uttered casually (with or without any premeditated motivations behind them), or as careless, reflexive responses, they nonetheless can act as potentially viable seeds that may grow into a countless assortment of dichotomous weeds.

With this in mind, do we really wish to propagate possible outcomes by heedlessly perpetuating phrases that are loaded with harmful meaning and potential to materialize as more duality? Many of them we have heard repeatedly throughout our lives. Here are just a few:

Go to hell.
Drop dead.
You're such a loser.
*God d**n it* (or) *God d**n you.*
Nothing's easy.
Nothing's free in this world.
You'll have to pay for it sooner or later.
Life stinks (or several profane variants)*.*
There always will be suffering (*pain, war,* or *sickness*) *in the world.*
There's no rest for the wicked.
Only the good die young.
You're born, you suffer, and you die.

[34] Although I have never regularly practiced many of these forms of group affirmations, I certainly have witnessed the potential they all possess to create manifest reality; and I also have noted their extraordinary effect (both dualistic and non-dualistic) on those who habitually employ them with or without consistent conviction and love.

You're killing me.

You're killing him (or *her*) *with kindness.*

Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong [Murphy's law].[35]

Accidents (or *disasters*) *come in threes.*

Nobody's perfect.

I'm stupid (or) *you're stupid.*

I'm always sick (or) *you're always sick.*

I never do anything right (or) *you never do anything right.*

I'm a bad person (or) *you're a bad person.*

Life's not worth living.

When will it ever end?

You make me sick.

Love is blind.

If God is such a loving God, how can he let such horrible things happen?

God is dead.

There are only two certainties in life: death and taxes.

When we say or even think such things, our words and internal narratives often are either spoken or silently deliberated with heightened degrees of emotion. Whether the feelings being invoked are those of passionate anger, hidden resentment, self-righteous condemnation, underlying fear, chronic worry, sudden foreboding, total resignation, or even *seeming* jest,[36] the emotionalizing of any thought is also a potent fertilizer; and as a fertilizer, it has the ability to accelerate growth and actualization within the material world.

Certainly, each earthly manifestation that we might cause may never have stemmed exactly or directly from what we have practiced saying, from the many implied meanings of

---

[35] According to *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary*, the etymology of Murphy's Law:

> ...probably originated with Edward A. Murphy, American engineer.

Additionally, according to *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*:

> ...Also called Murphy's First Law. [Amer.; after a fictitious *Murphy*, allegedly the name of a bungling mechanic in U.S. Navy educational cartoons of the 1950s].

[36] When some maintain that what they are saying or doing is only meant in *jest*, oftentimes they simply are denying any intentions that are hurtful, cruel, or destructive. A common example would be when someone says to a friend, "Wow, you are so fat [old, ugly, stupid]". In response, the other person suddenly reacts angrily or burst into tears instead. To avoid responsibility for making such a callous comment, the initiator of the remark replies with something such as, "I was just kidding". In actuality, the underlying objective certainly was to make a jab at the friend's appearance or intelligence. But only when faced with an unexpected emotional reaction and not wanting to be blamed or feel ashamed for acting with insensitive, cruel, demeaning, or even vicious intent, the offender resorts to using the excuse of *jesting*. This is a frequent response for rejecting altogether any wrongdoing, accountability for what has been said or done, and the need to apologize.

what we say, or even from any underlying intentions or beliefs. However, all of our verbalizations—whether they are intentionally, randomly, audibly, or silently executed—may nevertheless become a part of the many hodgepodges constantly arising in the material universe. These jumbling weeds can include infinite combinations of thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions we perennially are growing dualistically (either deliberately or unwittingly) as individuals and in conjunction with the thought practices of any number of those groups also affecting our material outcomes on a regular basis.

Even within those expressions that we deem to be totally innocuous, their underlying connotations can oftentimes trigger or grow into unexpected and undesirable outcomes in our lives. One such saying might be:

Charity begins at home.

At face value this appears to be a harmless and practical proverb. However, its meaning still may generate dualistic results, depending on possible unconscious intentions hidden beneath the surface of that meaning.

For example, we may observe that when this expression frequently is used by the same individual, it nonetheless can be a cloak concealing hidden intentions also being practiced. This seemingly reasonable pronouncement may be nothing more than an excuse for validating our unwillingness to give outside of the family circle. Such unconscious affirmations may seed selfishness, along with numerous other dualistic weeds denying the blossoming of divine love. Here are just three examples:

1. *Being selectively generous within our family but acting tightfisted when it comes to everybody outside the family…*

2. *Expressing concern to those close to us but caring very little for those with whom we have no direct emotional investment…*

3. *Convincing ourselves that a select few are worthy of our support if they fall within the guidelines of our personal agendas while no one else is…*

In truth, if we give only to our family, aren't we actually giving to no one other than ourselves? After all, family simply is an extension of our own blood and being; and it is responsibility not charity that should motivate such activity. Granted, non-dualistic responsibility should always be propelled by charitable love, as with all potential divine

attributes; and certainly, giving is a part of every *balanced* obligation. But duty to our kindred cannot justify the refusal to extend assistance and all other forms of giving beyond the borders of hearth and home.

Another case in point can be found in an old Tibetan saying that nevertheless may manifest dichotomous outcomes as well. It goes something like this:

> If you fall down, pick yourself up. If you fall down again, pick yourself up again. If you fall down a third time, pick yourself up three times. If you fall down ten times, then you get up ten times as well. Even if you fall down one hundred times, you must pick yourself up each and every time.

This simple adage might indicate that no matter how, when, where, or why we stumble throughout the course of our lives, it is imperative for us to continue and never give up. Briefer and definitely more American alternative renditions of this saying are "Keep on keepin' on" and "Keep on truckin'". These words possibly could instill in us the impetus to develop perseverance, tenacity, and hope.

On the other hand, when we have continuously rehearsed useless thoughts such as *life stinks* and *nothing ever good happens to me* (added to recurring intentions, actions, and emotional reactions of resentment, anguish, doubt, futility, jealousy, anger, retribution, and the like), then combining any number of these practices with the idea of getting up repeatedly conceivably might manifest into extended cycles of accident proneness, ongoing incidents of victimization, a long succession of failed endeavors, or continuums of life-threatening conflicts, crises, afflictions, tragedies, and disasters—all equally unimaginable, unhelpful, and unwanted. Yet, they can and do manifest from the thoughts we have sown throughout the course of our lives.

Regardless of whether we are regular practitioners of religious or non-religious belief, philosophy, art, music, scientific research, mathematics, sports, technology, agriculture, retailing, retirement, leisure, law, business, gambling, panhandling, investing, swindling, philandering, politics, warfare, worrying, complaining, cheerfulness, hope, encouragement, optimism, pessimism, poverty-consciousness, disaster-consciousness, positive thinking, prosperous thinking, altruism, philanthropy, and all other pursuits and beliefs known to humankind, we consciously or unconsciously use the ideas in the lists mentioned earlier in this chapter, along with many other ideas, as we strengthen and reinforce the manifestations of our

individual and collective realities. Once we carefully examine all personal successes, failures, dreams that came true, deep-rooted fears that assumed physical form, and the conscious or unconscious practices and preparations that took place beforehand, we will discover many of those manifestation-making ideas (through our faith and belief in them) were already at work within our thoughts, our ideas, our emotions, our intentions, our beliefs, and our actions. Hence, *faith* in anything systemically occurs before the *fact* of its material existence arises.

VII.

Tools, tasks, and techniques for the conscious gardener...

As a musician, I often have contemplated how musical composition actually materializes from the internal and external practices of any composer. Just because some individuals may hear magnificent melodies inside their heads, it doesn't make them composers, nor does their ability to *hear* music within the mind make those intangible tunes musical compositions.[37]

[37] A couple of years ago, I was listening to a radio program where a distinguished researcher spoke about when he first began hearing music in his head. He then alluded to this phenomenon as an audio *hallucination*. Apparently, he had never acquired such an ability before that time. I refer to this type of mental/musical activity as an ability rather than a hallucination, because hallucinations indicate a reaction caused by disorders of the nervous system, from being in a state induced by taking certain types of drugs, from serious illness, from sensory deprivation, or from an extreme focus on specific objects or tasks.

However, any well-trained musician and many others who incorporate music into their lives on a regular basis probably would agree that hearing *songs* in their heads is a byproduct of regular listening to and hands-on practice of music. Those who sing regularly to themselves often duplicate with their singing voices tunes that they hear in their minds. Great composers regularly resort to putting down on paper extraordinary melodic ideas that were heard or even *performed* first internally.

Except in individuals with some sort of sickness or who are inclined to taking hallucinogenic drugs, I submit that this type of mentally generated musical *hearing* is simply a skill that is developed through practice, although in most cases the practice is usually unconscious. It would be well to consider that almost all of us in current human society hear spoken words in our heads on a daily basis. Certainly, there are cases where some sort of psychological or neurological illness happens to be present; but normally speaking, none of us ever would consider this form of interior *speech* as hallucinatory. The reason is that everyone constantly practices speech—either vocally or by listening to and observing the speech of others—usually during most waking hours of our lives. Also, when we read written words, oftentimes we hear those words spoken while we are reading silently. Various forms of practicing speech is so pervasive in human society today that all of us have also learned the skill of *speaking* in our minds: as a single voice, in dialogue between two or more voices, and as a chorus of many voices speaking *tout ensemble*.

Composers are the physical instruments through which lasting works of music grow and blossom into their fullest tangible form.

First, we have to practice and develop either consciously or unconsciously enough of the appropriate skills needed to conceive musical ideas within our minds. Perhaps, we then hear an enticing tune in our heads; or if we are adequately trained, we might build mentally a complex musical structure without any need for external auditory assistance or validation.

Regardless, we may choose to dismiss our ideas entirely or continue to develop them into a more *materialized* form by possibly humming some of those ideas to ourselves. Additionally, we perhaps could rush to a piano, a guitar, or another musical instrument in order for us essentially to hear outwardly not only the hummable melody but also to implement the physical execution of melodic and harmonic ideas required to be performed simultaneously.

If we have the capacity for it, we might choose to omit the preceding step and simply begin notating our ideas on paper or into a computer with the aid of a music notation program. For those of us who never studied how to notate music, we might record our ideas onto tape, compact disk, or computer and utilize a sequencing program for assisting us in editing and adding to our initial performance.

After a musical composition is recorded into a written or audio medium, we may further affirm its existence within the corporeal realm by having the appropriate musicians interpret it from a written score, perform it from memory, play it by ear, or improvise on said work by

---

Because a much smaller portion of humanity practices music on a regular basis, it is understandable that someone who first realizes this ability during adulthood might find it to be a startling discovery, even interpreting it as and pronouncing it to be an extraordinary *hallucination*. That being said, research has shown that many do hear music in the form of hallucinations during certain illnesses. Distracting, uncontrollable, and irritating music can seem to emanate from this object or from that direction—whereby those experiencing such audio illusions have no control over or desire for these manifestations.

On a personal note, I began listening to *mental music* from a very young age. I was exposed to daily family singing and also regular choral singing in school, from kindergarten to college. Many of my relatives were performers of traditional Irish and Scottish music, and of the folk melodies of the Appalachian Mountains in the eastern United States. After beginning to study the piano at the age of four, I began improvising soon thereafter. I was used to the improvisatory styles of music I heard my relatives perform regularly during my younger years.

By the time I was a teenager, I could listen to internally manufactured symphonies, concertos, operas, pop tunes, and even sitar ragas that were totally original while seated in the back of our car during family road trips. When I began practicing piano concertos for hours each day, I not only could hear myself playing every note of those compositions accompanied by a full orchestra, but I also could see in vivid color my entire performance onstage. Even upon waking from a dream, where I would be performing my own original piano music with symphonic ensembles of various sizes, I often continued singing the dreamt compositions after reaching a fully awakened state.

Unlike hallucinations, I usually could bid this music to begin; and within seconds (though sometimes taking as much as a few minutes to generate) these self-induced *concerts* would resound all about me. However, if preferred, I frequently could keep the sound internalized, rather than allowing it to permeate my external existence. Also, contrary to the definition of hallucinations, I almost always could stop these performances if I requested them to stop.

In Chapter 6, *Eradicating Illusion*, I will discuss further various types of—what are considered to be—hallucinations and how in many cases they instead could be practiced perceptions.

singing or playing it on the instrument (or instruments) designated by the composer or on any other instrument chosen by improvisers or arrangers—and can be performed in a wide range of acoustical environments for further enhancing the musical outcome. However, without ongoing repetition or practice throughout each phase of creating a musical composition, completion may not occur; or it may come about with less than desired results.

The reason I chose the above example to illustrate some of the more general elements of manifestation is that it is an obvious model to which many should be capable of grasping immediately and with relative ease. Scientists, mathematicians, novelists, poets, inventors, artists, entrepreneurs, software engineers, and all others who practice generating and manifesting a wide variety of things stemming from an initial thought definitely experience similar processes while creating them. Regardless of whether or not we are willing to accept or are capable of comprehending such activities, our thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions trigger these sorts of processes in everything around us—no matter how apparent, subtle, connected, or unrelated they may seem to be.

Additionally, as we practice these various phases of manifestation, we also are constantly planting and fertilizing additional practices with successive thoughts and with their subsequently manifesting ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions. A few previously mentioned ideas—which oftentimes are effective aspects of our *manifestation activities*—include ***visualizing***, ***petitioning***, ***examining***, ***requiring***, ***beginning***, ***replicating***, ***persisting***, ***perceiving***, ***anticipating***, ***being certain***, ***releasing***, and ***creating***.

With the conscious or unconscious use of these and similar tools, all technological breakthroughs come into being. Not only do ground-breaking scientific discoveries, innovative mathematical proofs, best-selling novels, and award-winning films evolve in such a fashion, but so do political uprisings, wars, bank heists, scams, schemes, starvation, pollution, climate change, and genocide as well. Additionally, ongoing apathy, boredom, mediocrity, and failure also are practiced—even to the point of great proficiency—using these and similar dualistically fashioned (and fashioning) ideas.

Even if any of these materializations are not our own blossoms (directly resulting from practiced thoughts and ideas), they are still their offshoots and by-products—possibly formed by *grafting* or *hybridizing*—when countless, even-random individual and group thoughts are combined together with those we actively practice with any (or no) degree of awareness.

It is important to remember that every dualistic manifestation is a weed in bloom, and

all weeds come into being as we sow both our individual and group thoughts insensibly and unconsciously.[38] These include the dichotomous thoughts not only of collectives in our present-time reality, but also of those stemming from numerous sub-groups within ancestral collectives in the past, and among the future thoughts of our unborn progeny who will inhabit nameless worlds yet to be.

From a scientific perspective, William A. Tiller PhD, Walter E. Dibble Jr PhD, and Michael J. Kohane PhD described a series of experiments that were designed to demonstrate the effects of our intentions on material reality. In a work that they coauthored in 2001, *Conscious Acts of Creation: The Emergence of a New Physics*, the first sentence of their *Preface* states:

> This book marks a sharp dividing line between old ways of scientific thought and old experimental protocols, wherein human qualities of consciousness, intention, emotion, mind, and spirit cannot significantly affect physical reality, and a new paradigm wherein they can robustly do so!

Along with other numerous findings, these experiments showed that the pH of a saline solution could be increased or decreased simply by consciously directing human intention and thought. While such setups dealt with very specific cases of physical manifestation, consistent

---

[38] Earlier in this work, I have referred to the *sowing* or *planting of weeds* more than once. While contemplating my figurative use of these words, a friend pointed out that gardeners never sow weeds, neither literally nor metaphorically:

> No one plants weeds, not even unintentionally. Even if you aren't a skilled gardener, you simply go out and buy seeds—and they don't have any weeds in them."

We could hope that this is the case, but it turns out not always to be true. My parents, both having been accomplished gardeners, occasionally complained about the commercial seeds that they had purchased. Those costly packages sometimes contained a hefty assortment of weed seeds as well.

When I was young, I recall my mother becoming quite angry one day. She went out to the garden only to discover that wildflower seeds she had planted actually sprouted into an interesting collection of many lovely flowers combined with an impressive assortment of weeds as well.

On several occasions, when my father purchased grass seed in bulk, he found that he would need to change brands. Some batches would germinate into a good deal of crabgrass—*the king of grass weeds*, as he used to call it. (Crabgrass is a very strong and prolific form of grass that readily is considered a weed.) According to *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary*:

> ...[it is]a grass (especially Digitaria sanguinalis) that has creeping or decumbent stems which root freely at the nodes and that is often a pest in turf or cultivated lands.

There may be better quality control with seed packing these days, but it nonetheless is quite possible to plant weeds unintentionally.

Furthermore, when I was speaking about sowing weeds in the mind garden initially, I meant to indicate that we do so when we aren't actually conscious of being gardeners at all. In that state, we can never be gardeners. Instead, we simply are the blossoms of dualistic weeds that our parents have sown, just as they were the crop of weeds that their parents also had planted before them. Without consciously practicing divine love, all of us are nothing other than weeds proliferating more weeds; and we do this with every thought that we think and with every emotion, intention, belief, and action that we subsequently are practicing.

and positive results could be achieved only with certain stable and reliable conditions; and those essential prerequisites apparently couldn't be realized without repetition or practice:

> ...Thus, in much of the work reported on in the following experimental chapters, the state of locale conditioning is not precisely known and it is slowly drifting upscale... as the basic target experiment is repeated again and again. Only when the locale conditioning state reaches the upper plateau can one expect precise repeatability of the experimental results.

After considering this research along with the various anecdotal results that countless others have reported over the years—in addition to the many interesting outcomes occurring in my own life—I believe that while more of us increasingly practice (either as individuals or in groups) similarly implemented *exercises* in what might best be regarded as *conscious thought-to-matter-transformation "experiments"*, we should expect more and more inspiring results as our practice improves progressively, taking into consideration that any proficiency is equally dependent on how much our practiced belief in such possibilities also increases. As our overall understanding and capabilities (to create consciously conceived outcomes) continue to be practiced and improved upon, each subsequent corollary will become increasingly more substantial—and wondrous as well.

In order that such manifestations are facilitated in becoming totally balanced and non-dualistic, it is essential that all of our investigational approaches are filled with fully conscious intentions of divine love. These intentions can be amplified by including a meditative focus upon a specific series (or list) of potent ideas similar or identical to those mentioned earlier in this chapter within the section entitled: "How outgrowth from thought materializes".

Our guided intentions should comprise of at least some of the following ideas found in that list. These might include:

1. *Inquiry*
2. *Choice*
3. *Visualization*
4. *Affirmation*
5. *Persistence*
6. *Acceptance*
7. *Hope*

8. *Faith*
9. *Surrender*
10. *Rejoicing*
11. *Command*
12. *Thanks*
13. *Praise*
14. *Manifestation*

(Any ideas from that list might be used along with other similar ideas and not necessarily in any prescribed order, including the sequence suggested above.)

Regardless, whenever intentions that we employ—whether they be in a formal experiment or simply as a part of our everyday living—are fertilized consciously, consistently, correctly, and completely with specific emotions, beliefs, and actions, there should immerge noticeably beneficial outcomes with ever-increasing degrees of effectiveness. Certainly, any methodology must be kept straightforward when the intentions of more than one person are being applied, as was done in the aforementioned studies.

At any rate, not knowing the specific implementation used in each of those prior experiments nor the precise intentions produced by every participant in all of said studies (yet still recognizing the striking results that these experimenters actually did obtain), I believe that some thought-generating sequences had most certainly been utilized nonetheless. This would be the case even if the foregone intentions were generated with the assistance of *idea-less* ideas found within the traditional notions of some meditational practices. These *non-ideas* can include the pure, egoless state of oneness that always exists within us. In this condition, such *thoughts of emptiness* can be considered to be devoid or empty of all illusion while dwelling eternally within divine compassion.

The abovementioned examples are presented here as a means to assist us in recognizing the underlying, multifaceted practices of cultivating any specific thought or idea. Such an ability is essential while we prepare ourselves to become conscious gardeners. It can instill within us the aptitude to further identify each resultant manifestation stemming from our consciously or unconsciously reiterated thoughts. With this having been said, let us now resume discussing the metaphorical tasks of clearing, planting, fertilizing, fencing, pruning, and weeding.

Daily meditation, prayer, and the practice of writing and reciting affirmations are three valuable tools for conscious gardening. Other beneficial *mind garden implements* can include

regular routines of reflection, study, playful interaction, and bodily movement.[39] Nevertheless, they all have the capacity to be used to plant, fertilize, or fence the thoughts we choose to develop and manifest. They also can clear away and weed everything we perceive as requiring eradication or removal. Additionally, they in fact can transmute dichotomous weeds into buds of divine attributes. However, every outcome depends upon the kinds of motivations, intentions, skills, and techniques employed at the time.

In the following passage from *As Above So Below: Paths to Spiritual Renewal in Daily Life*, the idea of utilizing practice to further our spiritual development or to develop our abilities as conscious gardeners (using the parlance incorporated within this text) should become an ongoing, regular, and even habitual enterprise. It normally evolves into an engagement occurring not just during prescribed and formalized practices. This insightful book was written and compiled by Ronald S. Miller and the editors of the *New Age Journal*:[40]

> As we grow in spiritual understanding, our notion of practice undergoes an evolution. At first, we partition off specific times and places for our Yoga, prayer, or meditation. For

[39] I have often found that reflection or contemplation can be used as a tool that appraises our thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions while deciding how to incorporate our meditational, affirming, and prayerful findings with those thoughts and their derivatives. Study or research often acts either as an impetus and guide for or a confirmation of our meditations, affirmations, and prayers. Here is just one example of when study essentially has verified the outcomes of these practices for me personally, as well as providing similar results for many others with whom I have conversed over the years:

Soon after having gained important insights from having meditated, affirmed, or prayed, I occasionally was compelled to read a seemingly random book discovered while browsing either in a bookstore (or library) or having had one unexpectedly handed to me by some friend or stranger and quickly recognized that whatever I happened to be reading confirmed the discoveries I just had made while meditating, affirming, or praying. Oftentimes, these materially visible confirmations reiterated my newfound insights word for word. Countless other times, I suddenly would be prompted to tune into the middle of a TV or radio program. Quickly, the realization would come to me that to whatever I was listening and/or viewing completely corroborated with and frequently repeated identically those recent revelations bestowed upon me while deep in meditation, reciting inspirational affirmations, or radiantly induced by ardent prayer.

Aside from contemplation and study, the conscious gardener should be willing to play. The act of spontaneous playing readily acts as a harmonizing and healing mechanism for excessive labor, soberness, sadness, and any other unbalancing condition where we tend to take ourselves and our life situations too seriously. This is because play has the power to re-instill levity and bliss into an otherwise dark and overburdened state that we may have been practicing unconsciously. Without utilizing this vital gardening tool, everything in our lives easily could materialize solely as drudgery and toil—fueling further only loveless, joyless, and unstable dualistic manifestations into the world.

Finally, engaging in a regular routine of moving the physical body can help in balancing our corporeal presence with our mental, emotional, and spiritual states of being. Physical labor sometimes can achieve this but also may bring unwanted stress and strain into the equation instead. But a conscious physical practice devoted to harmonizing our bodies with every aspect of living can be a vital tool for optimizing our more meditational and contemplative pursuits.

Activities like yoga, t'ai chi, and any of the martial arts can be useful in accomplishing this balance. But regular activities such as swimming, jogging, weight training, dancing, hiking, and even walking also can serve the purpose. An important thing to remember is that no matter which of these pastimes we choose as a regular ritual, our intentions and all motivating factors should remain focused on and centered within divine love always. Otherwise, any of these endeavors simply might manufacture more dualistic weeds into our existence.

[40] Ronald S. Miller (c. 1945–present) is an author and award-winning journalist. He has taught courses in transpersonal psychology, human development, and stress management at universities and other venues.

> example, we may set aside formal periods of meditation to quiet the mind's ceaseless agitation… and then return to the nonpractice arena of daily life, frequently to lose our equilibrium in traffic, at work, or in upsetting relationships. Eventually, as meditative awareness deepens and permeates all aspects of life, the inner and outer worlds merge as mirror reflections of each other. Practice, like clothing initially reserved for special occasions, becomes part of our daily wardrobe, worn with ease wherever we find ourselves.
>
> Practice need not be limited to conventionally spiritual disciplines, but can include numerous forms of activity, including walking, washing dishes, cooking dinner, and even changing diapers…

However, not unlike the use of other human-made implements—including hammers, knives, forks, matches, needles, pens, mechanical machines, electric appliances, and electronic devices—the way we practice utilizing the mind gardener's tools of meditation, prayer, and the reciting of affirmations can either be beneficial and life-enhancing, ineffective and inconsequential, or destructive and even deadly. Indeed, they can be used to proliferate and harvest the conscious plantings in the mind garden but can beget unconsciously any number of dichotomous weeds as well.

There are those meditators who like to assert that they have been practicing much of their lives, hours each day. A sense of wisdom might even radiate from what they say and do. But despite countless years of meditating, some continue to be as indifferent, selfish, deceitful, arrogant, and hurtful as they were before they began their meditational routine decades earlier—even if they now disguise their lifelong foibles with a superficial vestment of kindness and understanding.

Equally, there are avid supplicants found in every faith who have adopted a regular regimen of prayer for as long as they can remember. Yet, many of them incongruously continue to hold poisonous, sanctimonious grudges. They persist in their old habits of gossiping and judging without cessation. They also can speak odiously of those who do not agree with their points of view, and put down others in order to validate and reinforce their dubious and self-pronounced righteousness and beliefs they consider as being superior. These types of practices always unfold into infinite assortments of deception and delusion.

Additionally, some who practice reciting affirmations daily, do so in order to achieve self-

serving, manipulative, and even unsettling results, albeit said practitioners often convince themselves—or are convinced by others—that their goals are genuinely altruistic and spiritual in nature. Nonetheless, such practices actually proliferate only the most subtle and insidious of weeds. Nothing but self-deception and divisiveness towards others can amount from these kinds of enterprises.

In each of these three cases (of meditators, affirmers, and those who pray), their harmful thoughts and intentions regularly can be acted out in the guise of humility, piety, generosity, prosperity, goodness, balance, and even wisdom. This should remind us that any tool can be as injurious as it is useful. However, such is the way of all things in our illusory realm of separations, distances, spaces, and times—and such is the way of all duality.

That being said, the mindful practices of meditation or prayer, and the *consciously compassionate* employment of affirmations are nonetheless vital instruments for tending the garden of our minds. For instance, when we learn the meditative technique of *emptying*, we begin the process of *clearing* our mental soil of all sorts of encumbering, distracting, and ever-deafening thoughts. This prepares the potential plot for attentively planting seeds of divine love.

While relaxing body and mind—often with the assistance of deep breathing, an optional spoken or unspoken mantra, and balanced posture—we can systematically sweep away the dualistic, internal dialogues that plague our daily lives. Those inner debates, endless fretting sessions, and self-righteous rants are the crux of all mindless practices in which we engage ourselves unconsciously. They forever sow seeds of disparities and confusion; so using meditation to remove such rubbish from our inner soil is a necessary step in creating and maintaining a properly tended garden.

However, conscious gardening is never attained exclusively by simply *clearing*. Every gardener knows that any empty plot doesn't fashion a garden of its own accord. Solely clearing and emptying our garden plot over and over again often leads to another futile, dualistic activity. Many who meditate in this manner will eventually tire of the endeavor and discontinue clearing altogether.

In so doing, we actually sow and perpetuate more duality: clearing and NOT clearing, practicing and giving up the practice, gardening consciously but reverting into the unconscious habit of allowing weeds to grow, flourish, and retake the garden. This is likely to happen even while we are convincing ourselves that we always tend it diligently and do so on a daily basis.

Additionally, if we cling to the single task of clearing, a sense of futility might eventually

arise. We could start sensing that our meditation seems to be having no effect on us or our lives. At this point, we may begin to emotionalize that futility—fertilizing our inner soil with feelings of frustration, fear, annoyance, anger, boredom, failure, self-condemnation, and other equally undesirable and weedy thoughts, ideas, emotions, and intentions.

Finally, those who become completely attached to the process of clearing (utilizing it as a means to an end) will perhaps cultivate a meditation that is a weed unto itself. In this state, meditators can trick themselves into feeling that they have gained a high level of clarity, perception, and even compassion by solely repeating endlessly and exclusively the practice of emptying.

Indeed, a sudden removal of much internal and external chaos may appear to be an incredible breakthrough in our personal development. We can be so enamored with the fulfillment of clearing our *plot* that we then are deceived into thinking that the garden is complete and our task is realized. In this empty state, we suddenly can perceive irresistible light and peace, mistaking it perchance for a sacred vision or an enlightened condition.

Certainly, such an *empty* garden plot may seem like a great accomplishment. This will occur when we eventually are facing a discernible, plant-worthy space that didn't exist prior to clearing and emptying.

However, I will reemphasize that a clear and untilled plot of land does not constitute a garden of any sort, nor does it indicate that those who created this clearing are necessarily wise, compassionate, or enlightened gardeners. In fact, this incomplete task isn't gardening at all; but rather, it is simply an essential part of preparation in order to commence with gardening in earnest. Yet, it can ironically be used as an incitement to manifest the furthering of dualistic weeds instead.

The function of clearing land (and continuing the process by regular weeding) simply provides space for our chosen plants to grow without being sapped by competing vegetation, which is both unintended and unwanted. However, if we choose only to empty our *mental* soil without planting conscious seeds of compassion afterwards—along with other divine attributes—we will discover that those old weedy thoughts almost immediately crop up again in greater quantities, in greater frequency, alongside their subsequent dualistic manifestations.

This isn't much different from when we leave our backyard garden plot completely empty. Old weeds will systematically appear again and again. A similar example is that while we go off for a short holiday and make no arrangements with someone to continue with proper upkeep

of our property, we most certainly will come back to find a hearty new crop of weeds to welcome us home.

As mentioned earlier, when first experiencing our creation of an *empty plot*, life possibly will appear to be so much calmer and more lucid. The usual struggle and confusion that tend to pervade our day-to-day experiences suddenly fade away. Such an unfamiliar situation might seduce us into believing that the wisdom and compassion we are beginning to feel within ourselves automatically make us wise, empathetic, and enlightened beings—even while we neglect to practice these attributes in the outer world.[41]

Instead, this seemingly desirable detachment to the dichotomies around us can be rather a manifestation of avoidance, indifference, and self-indulgence. Furthermore, it can addict us permanently to those separating delineations keeping us conveniently isolated and also detached from the tribulations found in the world outside of ourselves. Paradoxically, such a condition is nothing other than the growth of still another well-disguised weed—a condition that keeps us separate and aloof—acting as an ironical hindrance to our quest of discovering and awakening the inescapable element of divine love within ourselves and its oneness with all others.

Any illusion of compassion can always be conjured internally, but no true love ever has been expressed or manifested only by clearing or emptying a metaphoric garden existing exclusively within our *heads*. Every bona fide seed of compassionate love must also be planted, fertilized, and allowed to emerge, grow above the soil's surface, and finally blossom as a

---

[41] Many years ago, I was watching a television series on world religions. One particular episode focused on a Catholic monastic order called the Little Brothers of Jesus. This particular group of these brothers were living in a village somewhere either in northern Spain or southwestern France.

Normally, the brothers worked as menial laborers in their local community alongside everyone else. They didn't dress as most monks typically do. Instead, they wore blue jeans and T-shirts. Their mission was to live humbly and simply, as Jesus did two millenniums ago.

During the course of their time in that village, each one of them would spend an entire year alone in a desert cave. While on *retreat*, they were required to live in silence, meditating, and praying throughout most of the waking day. As I recall, food and supplies were brought to the cave while each reclusive brother was out walking in the desert by himself. Therefore, all human contact remained minimal or nonexistent.

In the midst of that show, the program's commentator was invited to visit and film the brothers' isolated grotto in the wilderness. While surveying the pristine landscape, that reporter exclaimed how exceptionally beautiful the place was. He further remarked that, personally, he would find it difficult to leave such tranquil and idyllic surroundings. Then, he asked one of the monks if he ever felt like staying there forever. Even though I saw this program several decades ago, I still remember the brother's reply:

> We go into the desert; but then we must come out again.

This brother obviously knew that to remain in the desert would defeat the purpose of such deliberate seclusion. Indeed, this was an ideal place to clear the mental soil and even plant the seeds of love within. But without going back into the world, where the fruits of such an excursion could be harvested and shared, the entire purpose of withdrawing to this hidden hermitage would be in vain. Instead of removing duality with the love learned while living alone, an illusion of that love would pervade, creating only more dichotomous weeds rather than eradicating them.

manifestation in the outer world. Subsequently, this consciously sown expression of divine love should be nourished, protected, pruned, and weeded as we might do with any other planting we wish to usher into maturity.

Yet, the process doesn't end there. All divine attributes must be harvested and shared as well. In addition to cultivating them as thoughts, ideas, and intentions, they too must be fertilized with appropriate emotion and brought into material existence through balanced action.

Compassion, gratitude, mercy, charity, and all other divine attributes that are the offshoots of divine love cannot manifest into their fullest potential merely by our sensing or experiencing their presence internally. By so doing, even while our inner plot has been cleared and emptied of all apparent dichotomies, we create only another, more subtle seesaw of dualistic weeds.

In addition, our perception of newfound inner illumination, often discovered while emptying our minds by clearing out the rubbish and clutter (which we previously permitted to thrive within ourselves), may seduce us into believing that we must retreat entirely from worldly interactions altogether. Nevertheless, a hoard of earthly enticements may continue to distract and lure us, especially when we endeavor to remain fervently focused on or—in point of fact—to *cling* to the light and peace within. This unexpected condition of attachment most certainly will yield undesirably dualistic results after more seeds of turmoil and discontent suddenly proliferate throughout our lives.

Therefore, I will reiterate still another time that any meditational practice must proceed past the initial routine of clearing and continue with the additional undertakings of planting, fertilizing, fencing, pruning, and weeding. It is imperative to do this so we ultimately can harvest and share the fruits of our garden with everyone and everything else in existence.

While it seems to be more common in meditation to become *stuck* in the routine of emptying and clearing, an equally common shortcoming of many (namely those who solely practice routines of praying and reciting affirmations) isn't to clear a plot for planting at all. Instead, many who affirm and pray tend solely to plant their thought-seeds of supplication, hope, and need without first ridding their internal soil of preexisting weeds like fear, doubt, prejudice, worry, impatience, resentment, judgment, and countless others.

Simply put, it is essential to remove all unwanted growth from the soil in order for an actual garden to exist. If this isn't done, any seeds we intentionally sow might find it difficult to flourish because the preexisting weeds already are strong and can easily overrun and kill our

chosen plants. In such an environment, they will find it nearly impossible to survive long enough actually to manifest fully within our lives.

Moreover, not only do we need to remove any undesirable growth, but it is imperative that we dig deeply enough to discover the actual source of those weeds. Their roots must be taken out as well. Without extracting them at their core, any other more superficial forms of extraction would be like not weeding at all because each remaining root has the capacity to manifest a perpetually strengthening and ever-expanding crop of new weeds almost instantly.

For example, let us consider how internalized feelings of gratitude can be a seed, a potential offshoot, and an eventual conveyance and expression of divine love. However, simply because we *feel* grateful or perceive an inner sense of indebtedness, such a feeling alone doesn't constitute true thankfulness. It is imperative that we act upon those feelings and *express* them outwardly, bringing them more fully into material existence. This is where they then will truly bind and unite us with those who deserve to receive our appreciation.

But if we fail to express outwardly that gratitude which we feel within (or if we inwardly corrupt our thoughts and feelings with merely a semblance of love—one tainted by further expectations of return, hidden disappointments about not receiving as much as we anticipated, or anything else not being a true aspect of divine love), then we are merely allowing more weeds to crop up where we thought they had already been weeded away. In contrast, if we attempt to express our gratitude outwardly, but do so in a mindless and unconscious manner, then these types of flawed, dichotomous actions supposedly expressing our appreciation (or demonstrating gratitude) become nothing other than a deliberate yet unconscious means to flatter, hoping that we might receive more in return for that flattery.

Ultimately, those who deserve our recognition could feel hurt or exploited despite what gratitude that we initially generated internally. In response, they might think or do things that would instigate even more unbalanced and dichotomous interactions between us. Therefore, without practicing prayerful intentions beyond our meditational process of emptying, then these otherwise essential tools of the conscious gardener become nothing other than dualistic implements spreading more weeds devoid of divine love.

Likewise, if we simply act out an *expression* of gratitude without truly *feeling* it, this also tends to be incomplete, unloving, and—consequently—another weedy activity. It simply is an act of courtesy at best and cannot even imitate or reflect thankfulness as a divine attribute. Therefore, we might think of authentic gratitude actualizing only after both *feeling* and

expression are fulfilled with utmost sincerity.

Feeling simply is another word for *emotion*, and *expression* can be considered as a type of *action*. Therefore, the thoughts of gratitude (or any seeds of other divine attributes) cannot grow and manifest fully unless we both fertilize them with the *emotion* of compassion and equally take *action* lovingly upon them as we cultivate and demonstrate their pervasive, non-dualistic qualities throughout our day-to-day activities.[42] Practicing these sincere acts of thankfulness and appreciation can be considered a way to distribute the divine love dwelling within the gratitude we initially encountered as an internalized feeling.

As we choose to go beyond the emptying and clearing process so as to express gratitude throughout the tangible world in a variety of ways—to sow our empty plot with veritable seeds of first *imagining thankfulness* and allowing them to grow outwardly into more complete and perfected articulations of gratitude and love—there is a singular way to allow this particular course of growth to unfold and materialize expansively. It is perhaps one of the most powerful gardening tools to cultivate (through appreciation) the divine attribute of compassion that is available to us. It is the compelling but simple practice of *paying it forward*.[43]

This exercise in nurturing genuine gratitude has the capacity to affect countless people, even beyond those who have given us a reason to be thankful in the first place. During much of my life, there have been numerous occasions when I was witness to those who quietly and humbly engaged in such an enterprise.

Basically, *paying it forward* means that whenever anyone gives us something that will greatly better our lives, we then should give something else that will benefit a third party. The one condition of this extended giving is to make a simple request of all those who receive our gifts. Instead of feeling obliged to repay us (*paying it back*), they too should express their thanks by giving to still more people (*paying it forward*) when they are able to make this happen—and to do so lovingly.

The idea is to sow the seeds of our appreciation in new directions. So not only do we

---

[42] It is important to remember that the potentiality of all divine attributes and weeds exists not only as thoughts and ideas, but equally as emotions, intentions, and actions among others. It might be well to recall the discussion in the second section of Chapter 2—entitled, "An antidote for living among the weeds"—where all such componential derivatives of thought (like *emotions* and *actions*) are referred to as basic *mechanisms stemming from thought*.

[43] According to *Wikipedia*:

> Pay it forward is an expression for describing the beneficiary of a good deed repaying it to others instead of to the original benefactor. The concept is old, but the phrase may have been coined by Lily Hardy Hammond in her 1916 book *In the Garden of Delight.*

verbally thank those who have assisted us, but we also begin a chain reaction of practicing *random kindness*[44] as we potentially propagate gratitude—and ultimately the flower of divine love—across the breadth of humanity.

We have briefly discussed prayer and affirmations as potential tools of the conscious gardener as well as having somewhat of a more extensive look into how meditation can be used in a similar manner. But before continuing to expand further on all three of these garden *implements* in additional detail, I will relate the following personal accounts and then subsequently discuss how their manifestation was a result of either mindless, unconscious, and dualistic behaviors or the mindful implementations of conscious gardeners and the garden tools they carry with them.

VIII.

Making miracles manifest...

Let us take a brief moment before delving into these stories taken from decades past and ask ourselves what miracles are in actuality. Most people who believe in their existence think of them as rare and ephemeral occurrences that can only be experienced firsthand or witnessed by a chosen few. Others imagine them as things that have occurred only in the deepest recesses of antiquity and somehow have generally avoided being sighted in our world today, while those who tend not to believe in them at all declare that these seemingly inexplicable phenomena are nothing other than legends, myths, or the mere contrivances of wishful thinking.

However, miracles are potent and real. They are omnipresent. They can be perceived at

---

[44] As reported by *Wikipedia*:

> The phrase may have been coined by Anne Herbert, who says that she wrote "Practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty" on a place mat at a Sausalito [California] restaurant in 1982 or 1983.

any time. Furthermore, "they come in all shapes and sizes" if we choose to employ such a platitude to describe their condition.

When we behave as conscious gardeners and proceed by removing bracken, underbrush, and every sort of dualistic growth from our thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions (potential seeds and subsequent blossoms of both our metaphoric and actual garden of mind), we will come to understand that a most profound reality exists as nothing other than miraculous experiences and circumstances waiting for us to discover them and behold their ineffable radiance amid the hordes of weeds otherwise encumbering our lives.

What most of us fail to recognize is that miracles are not simply an anomalous happenstance. They only appear as such because most of us have the well-practiced and immutable belief that it is so. But (in fact) the miraculous should instead be considered as a ubiquitously perceived norm—although one which has been widely misconstrued or ignored altogether.

If Hamlet from Shakespeare's play of the same name actually didn't continually perceive life as being so bleak, his choices could have led him to an entirely different outcome by the end of the play. Moreover, it wouldn't have been inconceivable that this Prince of Denmark might have uttered words quite dissimilar to those found within his soliloquy also mentioned a couple of times earlier in the book:

> How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
> Seem to me all the uses of this world!
> Fie on't! ah fie! Tis an unweeded garden,
> That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
> Possess it merely...

As with all of us, a change in perspective often is all it takes to transform a seeming disaster or even a dull and meaningless circumstance into instances of eternal wonder. To use a parlance relevant to mind gardeners (and Hamlet alike), weeding away the *rank and gross* within our floral domain can allow us to uncover hidden blossoms buried underneath all the clutter and clamor of our lives.

How many times have we blindly missed miraculous opportunities to follow the guidance of hope, faith, compassion, and wonder? But instead we succumbed to memories of prior misfortunes, collapsed into predictable litanies of age-old fears, fell upon the cinders of self-

righteousness and resentment, or became trapped within an abysmal pit of doubt, desolation, and despair that dragged us away from the courage needed to propel us forward into joyful certainty?

So rather than turning right, our worries led us to the left into an unending tunnel of darkness. Instead of climbing upward to a lofty summit, we continued on a supposed safe course that soon sank ironically into a dichotomous quagmire of seemingly *spiritual quicksand*.

Yet, even as we floundered on the brink of disaster and desperation, there was a chance to find foresight and daring to lift ourselves upward and eventually soar high above all sorrows, shortcomings, and potential iniquities. One choice steered us along a trajectory through misery while another filled with compassion and hope often could reveal an extraordinary solution as the blessed alternative. After all, miracles are always there patiently hoping that we will finally run into them head-on and recognize them for what they have forever been.

In the following accounts—which I will now describe below—these diametrically opposed options definitely came to the forefront. One slight shift in the choices I made or in the choices of several others (some were those existing in real-life situations while a couple of others were fictional characters included to bring home an important point soon to become self-evident) could have allowed misfortune and misery to prevail while we were all blindly passing by the endless succession of miracles patiently awaiting each one of us, at every moment throughout our lives. Now, let us proceed with the stories:

When I was studying music in downtown Baltimore during the early 1970s, the homeless and indigent could be seen on every street corner. There were few days when I wasn't asked for spare change. As a student, I usually lived hand-to-mouth myself and barely had enough to get through each week. Nonetheless, I always tried to keep a little extra change in my pocket to offer whatever I could to any of those displaced and desperate souls whose paths I crossed daily.

As I became friends with some of them, they never pressured or harassed me into giving anything if I said that I had nothing to spare at the moment. Instead, they'd thank me again for earlier times when I was able to help. If any of them were reeking of alcohol, rather than handing out money that would certainly be used to buy more booze, I instead suggested that they accompany me to a local coffee shop where I could treat them to a sandwich and a cup of something hot. Since it was far cheaper than even the least expensive of all the other *greasy*

spoons nearby, two of us could each have a beverage and a small sandwich for less than a dollar all told.

One chilled and blustery autumn night, I was looking out of a nineteenth-floor apartment window with two schoolmates by my side. We noticed a homeless fellow scrounging through trash cans in front of the building. Although he was far below us, I could recognize him as my street pal *Good Ol' Bob*. While we were watching him from above, I thought of going downstairs to bring him some food but feared that he would be gone by the time I got there.

The three of us were discussing the situation when I asked my two friends if either of them knew how to make a paper helicopter. One offhandedly remarked that he and his brother frequently made them whenever he went home during school breaks, so he quickly dug up a large piece of paper with a pair of scissors and enthusiastically went to work.

While he was fiercely cutting up and folding this lightweight sheet, I filled a small packet with a trio of one-dollar bills and three quarters. A single bill with one coin added was contributed by each of us.

As soon as my friend completed assembling the new *aircraft*, I fastened our money pouch to it. We also attached a little, light-weight sign with the familiar phrase written in multicolored letters:

PENNIES FROM HEAVEN!

After dropping the helicopter a couple of times from the apartment ceiling to make certain that it was airworthy, we tossed it outside the window. Then all of us watched eagerly as our tiny drifting delivery boat glided silently in the direction of that trashcan hundreds of feet below.

It fluttered gracefully throughout the entirety of its brief journey and landed perfectly onto the sidewalk. To our delight, it put down just inches behind Good Ol' Bob. But there were a few tense moments when we were all afraid that it might actually crash into him. After all, our goodwill offering from out of the sky seemed to be coming from directly overhead!

Fortunately, our little paper machine instead made contact with the sidewalk as the quarters clinked noticeably when hitting hard pavement. All of us watching from on high were greatly relieved to witness our helicopter not smashing into Ol' Bob himself—though it came really close. In any case, if it did actually bash him on the head, he could have had a heart attack from the shock alone or it might have possibly even knocked him out from our otherwise good intentions.

Regardless, the moment those three quarters clattered loudly on the ground, our trash-rummaging Bob nearly jumped out of his shoes when he heard the clack directly behind him—one which we also could hear from nineteen stories above. Almost instantly, he made an about-face and eyed our paper craft resting there in plain sight.

After warily assessing this startling visitation, he bent down, picked up the helicopter, read our cryptic message, tore open the pouch, quickly shoved the manna into one of his trouser pockets, and looked skyward in every direction. Without an ounce of hesitation, he then bolted away from the trashcan and disappeared around the closest corner.

The following afternoon, I was walking home from a rehearsal at school when I spotted several of my homeless buddies across the way. They were congregating around Good Ol' Bob in the park. All of them were laughing loudly as Bob proudly showed off the little sign he found only the night before. It happened to be pinned to the front of his jacket, and he pointed to its handwritten slogan enthusiastically.

I was surprised to discover that news of the paper helicopter incident didn't fade away quickly. On the contrary, for several weeks I would be reminded of our innocent prank. There were numerous occasions when I was passing by any number of those homeless folk while they were congregating together. In each instance, all of them would be smiling atypically; and as I drew close to their merry gathering every single time, I could hear a familiar song that they were belting out with glee. It was one of the ditties my mother loved to sing when I was young. Little did I know how unexpectedly wondrous its lyrics would come to be so many years later. After all, it was that sweet old tune by Johnny Burke and Arthur Johnston, "Pennies from Heaven": [45]

...Every time it rains, it rains pennies from heaven,
Don'tcha know each cloud contains pennies from heaven?
You'll find your fortune fallin' all over town,
Be sure that your umbrella is upside down.

Trade them for a package of sunshine and flowers,
If you want the things you love, you must have showers,

[45] "Pennies from Heaven" is a popular American song written in 1936. With lyrics by Johnny Burke and music by Arthur Johnston, it first was introduced in a 1936 film also entitled: *Pennies from Heaven*. Directed by Norman Z. McLeod, this musical comedy starred Bing Crosby, Madge Evans, and Edith Fellows.

So when you hear it thunder, don't run under a tree,

There'll be pennies from heaven for you and me...

Although the helicopter incident wasn't exactly an example of *paying it forward*, Good Ol' Bob definitely passed along his joy and wonder to everyone he knew. After all, he had no money or possessions to give away. So what better means was there for him to express the true gratitude he obviously felt? By sharing this simple joy within an otherwise joyless environment, he actually manifested a miraculous transformation—even if he did so unconsciously and temporarily.

If, on the other hand, Bob ran off with his unexpected gift and bought a bottle of booze and hid in a dark alley guzzling away his little prize (or possibly hoarding this extra change either in his pocket or stuffing it in his shoe so he wouldn't lose it), the joy that he instead chose to sow among the hearts and minds of his homeless pals would have never come to be. He wouldn't have seen or utilized this or any other gift (no matter how big or small) as a potential seed of love that could be cast over the barren soil of his own life and over all those forsaken lives he seemed to touch with a seemingly nominal dosage of joy.

He chose to go beyond the apparent desolation of his homeless existence. And in so doing, he cleared himself of his sorrows if only for a short while—not as permanent as any conscious form of emptying such as others have come to do through mindful meditation—but he did it nevertheless.

In light of this, we should keep in mind how each of us can use any garden implement to create love, squander love instead, or even utilize such tools as a means for our own destruction. Moreover, it is well to remember that meditations, prayers, affirmations (and even the giving or receiving of simple gifts) solely used for emptying, clearing, or any other part of our gardening routine are only single steps—incomplete by themselves—and must never be mistaken for the entire process of gardening itself.

Without fulfilling all those steps compassionately, they too can be misused even as a dangerous weapon. However, like Good Ol' Bob we must bring whatever practices, attributes, and gifts we have discovered within ourselves so that they will manifest by sprouting upon a waking world, and we can subsequently share them with all those who enter the mortal bounds of our own personal lives.

After moving to the White Mountains in the mid-1970s, I soon became acquainted with

a family of avid music lovers in a small Vermont river town, about forty miles northwest of where I was living in nearby New Hampshire. While I was still waiting for my nine-foot piano to arrive from New York—where it had undergone the extensive process of being completely refurbished—these fine Vermont folks invited me to practice on their baby grand any time I wanted to make the trip up to their village. So, for that entire summer I commuted back and forth almost on a daily basis to the most unconventional workplace ever: a beautiful country house on the edge of the sleepy hamlet in northern New England.

Although I often drove there by car, it was also a perfect opportunity to ride my bicycle on a daily, eighty-mile roundtrip. Because my wife and I lived at an elevation of more than 2,000 feet above sea level, and our new friends lived more than 1,500 feet below us in the Connecticut River valley, my frequent bike rides had to navigate some challenging inclines in either direction. However, those countless, arduous climbs were rewarded with an equal number of lengthy, refreshing, and effortless glides down steep embankments while peddling in the opposite direction.

One day, during a break from my morning session at their piano, the kindly matron of the family asked if I would like to join her for a bit of lunch. After enjoying a meal of delectable sandwiches made from vegetables just taken out of the garden with fresh, hot bread she had scarcely finished baking that morning, we soon found ourselves at the kitchen sink cleaning up all of the dishes.

While handing me plates, cups, and cutlery she had just washed (so I could dry each of them in turn), my friend simultaneously remarked on the countless butterflies fluttering outside the window adjacent to where we were standing. As we each surveyed her bright and sunny yard, she continued speaking casually to me, pointing to the wide variety of birds perching on lower branches, and identifying by name the many types of flowers recently coming into full bloom.

Then, she unexpectedly changed the subject by asking if I was familiar with a particular family that lived in the largest house on the north end of town. Although I didn't know those folks personally, I did pass by their beautiful old home and often waved to them whenever I happened to be heading further up the valley.

She pointed outside the window once more, but this time directed my attention towards a vacant lot just beyond the border of their well-kept lawn. Apparently, more than a century ago, that sizable house on the other end of town was first built in this now-vacant lot where it

remained for many decades.

My friend suddenly looked meaningfully into my eyes, smiled in a somewhat wistful manner and began to tell me the following anecdote:

> …Yes, indeed! Our families were actually neighbors for decades. But back in the 1930s, there was a freak tornado that literally went up the entire length of Main Street from the south end of the village to the north.[46] The only house that happened to be in its direct path was our neighbor's. At the time, it was the biggest house around.
>
> But the tornado swept the entire building off its foundation, lifted it high up in the air, carried it across nearly the entire length of Main Street, and then parked it way *upstreet* where it remains to this day.[47]
>
> When my neighbor soon met up with the guy who owned the other parcel of land, so they could assess the damage and decide what to do about it, they were amazed to find that the house was almost completely intact. Other than lacking a foundation and needing a few minor repairs, there was no real structural problems at all and the foundation remained right here on the south end of town!
>
> Our neighbor simply said to the other man with that land up on the northside, "You know, I've always wanted to live up this way"; and the other guy chuckled and said in return, "Don't mind livin' down south either!" So they shook hands, swapped deeds, exclaimed how this had to be the cheapest house-moving ever, and that was the end of it.
>
> Of course, a bunch of people got together and helped lug the stones from the old foundation over to where the house finally came to rest. But other than that, it was almost

[46] Unbeknownst to me until that summer, tornados do occur occasionally throughout New England. Only a couple of years after first hearing about this incident in Vermont, a small tornado ripped through several miles of high country only a few miles from where my wife and I were living in New Hampshire. It flattened a large piece of dense, uninhabited forest. Fortunately, the single structure that happened to be demolished by the storm was an old, rundown barn abandoned long ago in the late 1800s.

Before moving to the north country, I always thought tornados were a unique phenomenon exclusive to the flat and wide-open plains and prairies of North America. To my surprise, although most frequently occurring in the midwestern and southeastern portions of the United States (an area commonly known as *Tornado Alley*), they can crop up in many other places around the world and come in many almost-unimaginable varieties—having a large assortment of shapes, sizes, and intensities as well.

[47] As my friend described how that enormous house was almost magically transported to the other end of her village, I couldn't help but recall in my mind that scene from The Wizard of Oz when a tornado carried an old Kansas farmhouse far off to Munchkin Land with Dorothy and her little dog Toto safely aboard.

> like there hadn't been a tornado at all. Very little damage was done to any building in town. In fact, most repairs were made to the street itself. It was a would-be disaster that turned out to be somewhat of a blessing in disguise—and a rather funny one at that!

This peculiar incident certainly does make for a compelling and humorous tale. As far as I know, the happy ending for those two property owners most likely persisted far beyond the brief time frame that my friend described to me while we were tidying up after lunch.

Although the remarkable conclusion to her story was clearly fortuitous, it didn't necessarily have to work out in such an agreeable fashion. In fact, if the intentions of those two guys hadn't been filled with an ample amount of kindness and trust, the upshot could have been considerably darker and more problematic—despite that the tornado probably wouldn't have had much to do with any of it at all.

They could have elected to squabble about money or any number of trite and insignificant issues instead of acquiescing to the creative and nearly effortless agreement by which they mutually abided. Any seeds of suspicion, greed, fear, or something as seemingly innocuous as worry could have destroyed their willingness to cooperate from the start. They might have wound up in a contentious court battle lingering on for months or more. Another equally dismal scenario could have included their entire families ensnared in bouts of bitter feuding for generations to come.

However, they recognized instead a benevolent opportunity that seemed ironically to be walking hand-in-hand with that potentially disastrous storm. Both men chose to fashion out of their precarious situation the most effortless and natural solution possible. The final decision to engage creatively and compassionately with one another acted as a means to stay clear of less-desirable outcomes. If they had selected to go down thornier pathways rather than the benevolent direction in which they chose to travel, other forms of calamity besides a mere twister may have been lying in wait for them within the not-so-distant future.

Although this tornado incident has nothing to do with any conscious meditational processes or any other routines readily used in active efforts or aspirations to garden mindfully, there nevertheless were more than one act of *emptying*, *clearing*, and *planting* happening then. Not only did the house get utterly *weeded away*—both tangibly and metaphorically—from the plot where it had been situated for decades, but it was immediately *replanted* into the already *weeded* space seemingly cleared and prepared for it well in advance.

Aside from the obvious parallels we can find in this story regarding the processes of

emptying, clearing, and planting taking place (although some might consider them to be only metaphoric in nature), there must have been many of the prior hopes and intentions of each of those property owners nurtured within themselves that were also torn away unexpectedly in those brief, crucial moments—another sort of weeding, figuratively speaking. Yet, in those same moments, seeds of fresh opportunities to proliferate something new and unique were also ready to be sown in their stead. What would ultimately be planted into these freshly cleared patches of mind and the physical realm depended solely on the choices selected by both men involved.

Our meditations, prayers, and affirmations are not the only tools that can wield enormous influence over our conscious and unconscious results in the *mind garden*. Whether or not we are aware of their relationship to us and how they can essentially affect the course of our individual and collective lives, disasters and other unfortunate circumstances can also be transformed into the most unconventional yet deeply emblematic tools of the mindful gardener—rather than simply being the horrors we deem them to be at face value. Both naturally occurring or manmade disturbances and catastrophes can ironically thrust upon us similar manifestations and outcomes to those we might have implemented much less disruptively by meditating, praying, and attentively affirming instead.

Such calamities might include fires, floods, diseases, famines, and wars. It is understanding how any devastating influences often have hidden potential also to be the unlikely implements for bringing about a myriad of miraculous transformations (if we have the insight, faith, and compassion to recognize them as such).

In one way or another, those two old Vermonters certainly did seem to see past the potential calamity that faced them and consequently were able to take good advantage of the situation. And, although this particular tornado raged down Main Street in their tiny river town, it nevertheless provided a somewhat oddball solution if those involved had enough clarity—in both heart and mind—to distinguish it from all of the other, less-opportune, potentially ill-fated outcomes.

The only difference between manifesting change from actively meditating, praying, or reciting affirmations and being forced to submit to extreme external forces—ostensibly beyond our control—is that those outside influences do not require any formalized types of practice from us. In fact, any underlying practices often occur altogether unconsciously. And their aftereffects are inclined to manifest in seemingly random situations amid severe circumstances.

Although, they do tend to manifest as a result of many unconsciously rehearsed affirmations and visualizations often induced by our own fears, worries, envy, greed, dishonesty, and a multitude of other *weedy* influences.

Whether or not we understand why such consequential calamities happen to us, these types of extreme events tend to be a part of that cosmic seesaw bouncing back and forth between increasingly more extreme shifts between our dualistic fears and hopes, sorrows and joys, and all other dichotomous fluctuations of thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions that we have repeated unwittingly throughout the years. Nevertheless, when we actually begin to weed out those dualistic activities, they can be reduced and ultimately eliminated when our non-dualistic thoughts and acts of divine love—including kindness, benevolence, and grace—are intentionally practiced and eventually perfected.

Even though those abrupt changes in our fortune caused by the dualistic seesaw shifting back and forth often do present us with unexpected dangers, debacles, and devastating illnesses, the sudden overturning of our lives can actually wipe the slate of our dichotomous existence totally clean (removing all of our duplicities, if only temporarily) and provide the opportunity of reseeding each moment of our life with an entirely fresh crop of beneficial and even extraordinarily blessed possibilities.

Speaking about the preceding two actual events from the past remind me of a quirky yet delightful film that came out in 2017. *This Beautiful Fantastic*[48] is a fictional account of a reclusive, young librarian who is incapable of moving beyond the tragic events of her infancy and early childhood. Consequently, she tends to avoid all close human contact in the present. Other than going to work each day, she remains basically alone by locking herself up in a small cottage that she rents.

Although there was once a sizable flower garden in her backyard, she refuses to care for it because of her deeply ingrained fear and distaste for vegetation (specifically) and the outdoors (in general). As a result, she has allowed her exterior surroundings to degenerate into overgrown entanglements of brambles and weeds, even while she maintains an indoor environment with a tidiness and precision clearly fueled by her obsessive-compulsive personality. Nevertheless, as the grounds surrounding the cottage continually fall further into disrepair, a cantankerous old man living next door begins badgering her about how she is

[48] Directed by Simon Aboud, the cast of *This Beautiful Fantastic* included Jessica Brown Findlay, Jeremy Irvine, Tom Wilkinson, and Andrew Scott.

"murdering plants" and makes the accusation that she's inciting an "unmitigated eco-apocalypse".

But despite all of his incessant grumblings, he gradually softens towards her and eventually begins showing his reclusive young neighbor how to rebuild and ultimately care for her garden. She desperately needs his help so as not to be evicted by the man she always assumed to be her landlord. Little did she know that this presumed landlord was simply representing her actual proprietor—someone who chose to remain anonymous.

No one ever suspected the irritable old man next door to be the one instigating the entire mess. That unwitting solicitor was simply acting on her neighbor's behalf.

In spite of all the underlying intrigue, a most implausible friendship develops between these otherwise mismatched eccentrics living adjacent to one another. As the girl begins to lose some of her shyness and compulsive behaviors (while learning to transform this unkempt space back into a splendid backyard sanctuary), the neighbor comes uninvited into her outdoor domain while she is franticly ripping a cluster of weeds from their stems. Although she is feverishly attempting to weed away all of the overgrowth, her hard work is not nearly as effective as she is hoping for, because without actually digging deeply enough to remove the root systems completely, her hopes of cleaning out the undesirable plant life around her house are essentially wrought in vain.

However, with a gradually mollifying attitude towards the situation, that otherwise-irritable old neighbor sympathetically offers her the following advice:

> If you leave the roots of the weeds in the soil, they'll grow back before you even finish digging. They'll strangle the life out of your new creation. It's just like a time bomb waiting to go off...

This scene is a perfect metaphor for those of us who choose to weed out the dualistic tendencies embedded deeply within our minds while they sprout as outward manifestations of endless hardships, confrontations, crises, illnesses, dysfunctions, and miseries perpetually afflicting our lives. Although we oftentimes attempt to improve our behaviors that may—for a time—appear to rid ourselves of these *weeds*, unless we delve deeply enough into the soil of our minds to get at the roots of those dualistic aberrations and remove them entirely, the end result will be exactly like what the old man indicated when he said that the weeds will simply grow back almost instantly.

Therefore, if we continually affirm or pray (no matter how balanced, appropriate, and loving our ideas and intentions seem to be) on top of preexisting, dualistic thoughts such as suppressed fears, worries, judgments, jealousies, disbelief, or lack of faith, the outcomes most likely will not unfold as we had hoped. Because of their underlying dualities, they're as likely as not to go seriously awry. Our affirmations and prayers could still manifest, but if they are hybridized with unconscious and *weedy* thoughts, then unexpected, disappointing, and even cataclysmic consequences might ensue. The following personal incident is an example of such an outcome:

In the early 1990s, I befriended a psychotherapist who quickly became intrigued with my use of affirmations. We had numerous discussions about how I actually composed and practiced employing them. Over the course of several months, his interest persisted and he constantly questioned me about the subject.

After much consideration, I decided to show him the most recent batch of my written assertions. This is something I almost never did. (My purpose for not normally revealing any unborn intentions to others will be discussed later in the chapter when I address the tasks of fencing and protecting any seeds and plantings that we choose to include in our garden.)

However, in this particular instance there were a couple of deciding factors for unveiling my *affirmation list* to him so willingly. First of all, the entirety of these two dozen assertions had already manifested by then. Secondly, I felt that he would be reliable enough not share this particular information with anyone else. He promised to keep silent about everything revealed to him at that time.

When I opened the appropriate computer file, he found himself reading not only what were my basic intentions (each one stated in a single, concise sentence) but there also were many other explicit details added. Each of them were included to expand greatly upon every personal proclamation that I had made. In certain cases, even some of the specific situations around which numerous affirmations were to manifest had also been described. Furthermore, a number of these declarations spoke of particular people, and still others depicted certain materials and tools I needed for my creative work at that time.

As my friend read through each paragraph, he smiled knowingly. Everything appearing on the page already was familiar to him. Indeed, each affirmation referred to something or some precise condition that already existed. By the time he finished perusing what I had written, he began to look puzzled. I instantly knew what was going through his mind. He couldn't

understand why I insisted on showing him a series of affirmations that didn't need to materialize. Indeed, all of them were obviously in existence already, and he became aware of the entire lot long before I showed him this file.

While he tried to find a polite way of asking me about this, I closed the computer file and suggested that he examine the file details listed next to their particular file name displayed onscreen. There, he could view the date when my affirmations had been last modified, and he then realized I had begun affirming everything on this page long before any of my hopes and intentions actually came into being. No changes in the text had been made since I first created it. Indeed, each of those affirmations were written at least three months before the two of us had ever met and long before any such statement had essentially materialized.

All at once, the impact of what he was reading suddenly struck him like a deafening clap of thunder exploding upon the preconceptions of his fiercely rational and organized mind. He turned his head and looked at me, dropped his jaw, and then exclaimed:

How?

In theory, he thought that he truly believed this sort of phenomenon to be possible. But when truly witnessing this large batch of two dozen affirmations really coming about exactly as they first had been stated in writing long before essentially manifesting, there still seemed to be an obvious air of disbelief residing within him. Although he certainly felt impacted by encountering this apparently wondrous singularity, it would be many months before he could bring up the subject to me again.

The actualization of those affirmations included a cash gift recently offered to me unexpectedly by this particular friend. It allowed me to purchase a new Steinway B (a seven-foot, *conservatory-sized* grand piano) costing over $40,000. This was an acquisition that was totally beyond my capacity either to buy or finance, nor did I imagine that there was anyone I knew at the time who could offer said assistance.

If I had predicted to those around me that even just this sole item on my affirmation list was going to occur within the near future, they would have laughed at me openly or nodded politely in agreement while chuckling to themselves. If I had disclosed the entire list to them ahead of time, I know at least one person who would have accused me of having delusions of grandeur while another among them might have suggested that I seek psychiatric help.

Despite any such presumptions, each of those manifestations were (like all others) the

result of my planting seeds of thought into the soil of the mind garden—albeit these were implemented both consciously and specifically. However, there regrettably were numerous problematic, dualistic, and unconscious materializations also realized at the same time. Unbeknownst to me then, I fashioned a garden without either first clearing the soil or weeding the area afterwards. I planted many thoughts, ideas, and intentions that were important to me, but I initially failed to clear out—and meticulously weed thereafter—those things that I didn't want to manifest simultaneously.

Consequently, the resulting fruits of my thoughts didn't merely comprise of those things that were consciously generated by my written affirmations. There were also many dichotomous factors (and subsequent incidents) rising out of unconscious conceptions that I never suspected to be part of the manifestation process. These several other unwittingly created materializations took shape as unforeseen interferences, difficulties, and a multitude of other undesirable outcomes.

Stemming from long-harbored fears, worries, doubts, and a wide range of other dualistic imaginings, these additional manifestations were produced from my own obliviously conceived thoughts buried deep within. In other words, I never realized that I needed to extract them fully before *planting* those consciously conceived affirmations that had been written down in the computer file and later examined by my therapist friend. Figuratively speaking, it was a very similar situation to when the young woman in *This Beautiful Fantastic* failed to dig up the roots of weeds before planting her desired selection of flowers.

My hidden fears, worries, and doubts were never removed and remained untended. They indeed were the metaphorical roots of my own personal weeds eventually emerging as interferences and hardships adversely affecting those desired affirmations that came into being with an unexpected array of problems.

Aside from failing to remove my own individually contrived weeds, there were countless group thoughts also affecting me unfavorably and (in fact) behaved like more *roots* of countless other weeds needing to be removed. They just happened not to originate in my own individual thoughts. Instead, they emanated from the inner workings of countless collectives of group thoughts that influenced me both in the past and present but likewise needed to be identified and extracted nevertheless.[49]

[49] It is important to remember here that other people's thoughts can and do affect our life's outcomes. Indeed, they also

Once I began to recognize the various lopsided consequences of my practiced affirmations, I rewrote my routine and immediately altered what I was reciting daily. Soon thereafter, the results of these changes began to show outward effects. Rather than continually thrusting me from one end to the other of that bumpy seesaw of duality, life around me suddenly came into balance.

It is true that there are those who might describe this incident in certain psychoanalytical terms, endeavoring to disprove instantly that my thoughts (strengthened as written and recited affirmations) actually could have specifically created or influenced further any of my material outcomes. They possibly would argue that there is no scientific evidence to support what I claimed actually had happened as a result of mere thought. However, in recent years there definitely has been enough research done to validate my assertion instead.

Moreover, anyone who offers such an instantaneous and oftentimes emotionalized allegation that "there is no scientific evidence", usually is trying to justify an unexamined and biased opinion of their own. Rather than spending many years (if not a lifetime) practicing the techniques that can and do show significant results, this type of argument simply is an untested conclusion that also has no basis in scientific methodology. Instead, it simply is another dualistic reaction perpetuating opposites, no more or less than what I found myself nurturing while initially practicing the affirmations mentioned above—those which were constantly recited before removing all the roots of duality manifesting ever-increasing problems for me.

Throughout numerous decades in the past, if I hadn't used meditation, prayer, and/or balanced affirmations as tools of conscious gardening, there were an inestimable number of instances when a more unconscious approach to the situation at hand easily could have resulted in my death or a permanently disabling injury. Certainly, this was the case with that broken-ankle incident in the wilderness, with the runaway bus in Baltimore, with the car spinning out of control down the icy mountain road, with meeting the wolf face-to-face, and with hundreds of other precarious and oftentimes pivotal moments in my life.

---

have the potential to alter the results of even our consciously affirmed thoughts and ideas that we have practiced reciting and acting upon faithfully. These group thoughts may include those of parents, siblings, family, extended family, teachers, schoolmates, media, society, and countless social, cultural, business, political, religious, governmental, scientific, medical, military, and ancestral groups.

A mindful acknowledgement of this phenomenon doesn't signify blame. Such awareness never constitutes an accusation upon anyone for the unfortunate circumstances we might experience. On the contrary, it simply is necessary to appreciate where all our weedy adversities originate. That is to say, we must recognize that every life-situation is crafted from our individually conceived thoughts and from endless thoughts generated by any and every group to which we have been connected. Once we discover the capacity to identify these sources, we can calmly rid ourselves of the resulting difficulties with understanding, wisdom, balance, and compassion. We do this as conscious gardeners.

When I was about seven years old, my paternal grandmother first began relaying stories to me about my granddad. Because he passed away shortly before I was born, I never got to know him personally. The endless anecdotes that *Granny M* told me were concerned largely with his later life, even though she did describe many things about him before she actually had met him personally.

This is perfectly understandable because she was more than thirty years his junior. Consequently, they didn't get to know each other until he had already become middle-aged. My grandfather's previous marriage also lasted for many years and his first wife had nine children that survived the crib.[50]

So he didn't meet my grandmother until quite some time after his first wife passed away. Despite the wide disparity between their ages, Granny M told me many happy stories about the numerous decades they spent together as husband and wife.

Grandpa apparently was a remarkable man who was well-known to everyone living near their small family farm in rural Connecticut. As a country doctor he was in constant demand. Because the need for his services never diminished over the years, and because his work always had been highly respected, many people remained being his patients even as he was nearing the ripe old age of one hundred!

My grandmother also told me that many people in the community regarded him as a man of many other *exceptional* talents throughout his unusually long life. (That's to say, he was well-known for having a wide variety of useful and unusual talents other than simply being a great doctor.)

One Sunday evening, when my family joined a couple dozen aunts, uncles, and cousins at Granny M's for a reunion supper, my grandmother unexpectedly pulled me aside, chatted amicably with me for several minutes, and then looked meaningfully into my eyes while she whispered to me in a secretive manner:

> You already know that your grandpa was the neighborhood doc. But what I may not have mentioned that he was (more precisely) a naturopathic physician. Aside from that, he also had a great love for plants, animals, and everything natural; and his mysterious

[50] In earlier times, families didn't tend to keep an official *count* of the children that died in infancy, according to my grandmother. These *crib deaths* oftentimes occurred quite frequently and were too painful to remember. Granny M produced a sizable brood herself. She had seven children who survived the cradle. All told, my grandfather had sixteen children that survived babyhood—including those Granny M had with him and those his first wife had earlier on.

> connection with God and spirit was amazing at times.
>
> For decades, there literally wasn't a person for miles around who didn't know and like him. Many people even admired him for his more unusual *talents*. To them, he was way beyond simply being their physician.
>
> It's true how the whole town respected and loved him. But there's no denying that everybody still considered him to be the most stubborn old Yankee for miles around and who was considered to be quite the eccentric as well.

Considering that Granny M never offered any further explanation about these enticing remarks until several years later, her brief words continued to remain in the forefront of my mind for quite some time thereafter.

But once I became a senior in high school, my parents occasionally allowed me to visit her by myself as soon as I got my driver's license. Then, this much-loved grandmother of mine quickly resumed telling me about my granddad; and for the first time, she did so with great detail.

After all, whenever I came to see Granny M previously—always accompanied by my entire family—such in-depth conversations were impossible to have. My parents were not normally keen on engaging in quiet and meaningful conversations about ancestral mysteries, family histories, and the like.

Moreover, because so many of my uncles, aunts, and cousins frequently showed up at the same time when we were there, it was obviously impossible to speak with her privately when they were also vying for her attention. That was repeatedly the case until I began prearranging our visits at times when we could be alone together and speak without interruptions.

This dramatic change in our relationship allowed us quickly to develop a very close friendship. As my previous shyness towards her began to wane amid this new intimacy, I finally mustered up enough courage to inquire about the unusual description of my grandfather she quietly imparted to me several years earlier. After mentioning other fascinating facts about him, she suddenly exclaimed out of the blue:

> Well, among other things, Grandpa really loved his bees!

Apparently, he kept a good number of hives out in the backyard. When they were first married, Granny M indicated to me that having so many beehives within yards of the back door to the house was quite unnerving for her.

During the summertime, my grandfather often would go up to the hives without a shirt on. I asked her if they ever stung him. "Sometimes", she replied:

> But usually they always seemed to be on their best behavior when your grandpa was around them and just wanted to be as close to him as possible. I think they loved him very much.
>
> Whenever any of the neighbors were having problems on their farms with a new swarm, they would come to the front door and ask for *the Doc*. Your granddad would walk to wherever the bees were. Hours later, I could see him striding up the road with a dark haze all around him. Holding a large pitchfork in front of his chest, there would always be a good-sized nest perched on top of the prongs. He was bringing a new batch of honey bees home with him.

Granny M continued the story by further adding that he always refused to wear any protective net over his clothing, even when he was leading an unfamiliar bunch into the backyard. She admitted to me:

> I realized that I had better get used to the idea of seeing your grandfather covered with bees, because I caught sight of him like that almost every day. But what was especially hard for me to handle was when they would follow him into the house after he had finished working outside!

Then she continued speaking with a peculiar smile of remembrance suddenly appearing on her face:

> You have to understand that this took place back in the days before we had screens on the windows. When our house was kept wide open on warmer days, sometimes hundreds of those confounded critters would zoom into the kitchen and buzz all around me as I was cooking.
>
> I always held an old dish rag in my left hand while making dinner with the other one. If

any of those bees got too fresh, I might have to use the towel in self-defense. But usually, all I had to do was wave my hand calmly towards the back door, and they immediately would turn in that direction and fly off to their hives.

Sometimes, a few stragglers refused to leave. But once I got their attention with one of my arms still swaying slightly, I was able to lead them to the nearest window. As soon as they came in contact with the fresh air from outside, all of them would zip away in an instant.

When she first told me about this, I found her story hard to believe. In fact, the idea of ushering bees away without anybody getting stung seemed to be absolutely absurd! After all, I grew up in a household where dramatic trials and tragedies were the status quo. My parents reacted inadvertently with excessive caution and frequent fear to even what is often considered to be an otherwise normal situation. Although they had an enormous desire to protect their children, they also taught us unconsciously many overly reactive responses to various circumstances.

Indeed, my normal childhood reaction to anything that could bite or sting was one of total panic. Therefore, such encounters almost always filled me with enormous dread and alarm. For the many years that I reacted in this manner, bees, wasps, and other insects stung me quite frequently.

It wasn't until I decided to try my grandmother's approach to waving away honey bees that my relationship with stinging and biting insects changed almost instantly. Although I didn't usually come across honey bees per se, I did have occasional contact with bumble bees, yellow jackets, hornets, and other types of wasps nonetheless.

The first time I used Granny M's *bee technique* was on a warm summer's day. I happened to be having lunch out-of-doors, when several feisty yellow jackets started buzzing aggressively around the soup I had been sipping. Suddenly, I remembered how my grandmother would wave away the bees with her hands. Could this seemingly simplistic gesturing also be effective with other winged creatures that normally display more belligerence than what those honey bees tended to demonstrate in my grandmother's kitchen?

Because my initial reaction to such insects always had been one of well-rehearsed anxiety, it took a great deal of focus to calm myself while signaling them away from my lunch. Surprisingly, they began to follow the movement of my hands almost instantly. As I became more confident with this practice, I discovered that the deep-rooted dread, which had built up

within me throughout most of my childhood, gradually disappeared altogether. While this phobia was waning, I continued to be astonished when all of these tiny winged individuals stopped attacking me so readily.

Moreover, once meditation became a daily routine and I started to rid myself of other thoroughly practiced fears and imbalances, I almost always found my occasional interactions with apiarian, waspish, and other winged *bugs* completely benign and non-confrontational. Nevertheless, whenever I did happen upon the more aggressive members of their species, I reminded myself to do as my grandmother did and calmly wave away the little critters with my hands. This unconventional practice has remained an effective and peaceful method for relocating them to locations further away from me. This remained to be true—even to the present day.

I still marvel at the fact that the two or three times I have been stung throughout the last several decades were when I found myself overly agitated; and by seeming coincidence, I also happened to be simultaneously straying too close to a hive or nest. Otherwise, such confrontations never happened, even while I carelessly stumbled upon numerous nests of enormous proportions.

Ever since I successfully began employing Granny M's *waving technique*, there still were many of my encounters with bees and wasps (including several potential run-ins with wasps of the more fearsome, hornet varieties) when it wasn't even necessary for me to *wave* them away. Apparently, the noticeable calm I tended to exude from my ever-expanding meditational practice greatly mollified their behavior whenever we came in contact with each other.

Several summers ago, one such incident occurred while I was venturing through the heart of the Pemigewasset Wilderness. I had been making my way to other parts of the forest, when (after trekking for nearly fourteen miles) I suddenly recognized the familiar, distant thunder from nearby Thoreau Falls. Its ceaseless rumbling permeated my senses. Every ounce of me was devoured by the constant cries of endlessly falling floods.

As those waters whirled fatefully over one merciless brink, their countless watery voices merged nymph-like with my soul. I found myself drowning irresistibly within a paradoxically profound stillness and an animating, joyful roar. My body floated along the path while I simultaneously appeared to have entered some hallowed sanctuary of timeless wonder, equally soundless and saturated with sound.

On that particular occasion, I didn't take my usual route to the falls—a shorter and more

direct path coming in from a different trailhead—so when I accidently veered off the path into an unfamiliar clearing, I wasn't aware of my error until I came face-to-face with the largest hornet's nest I've ever encountered. Over six feet high and almost three feet in diameter, it had been suspended skillfully from several sturdy sapling branches with its base nearly touching the ground.

As I was about to walk headlong into it, a pair of invisible, grace-filled hands (those which have visited me so many times during countless critical junctures in the past) electrified my skull and raised my eyes to see what was directly in front of me. Just as I was about to collide unwittingly into what would have certainly become a most painful and traumatic demise, the only response radiating from my being—while persisting in a magnetized state of serenity—was to back away without a sound.

Once I had a few moments to examine this grimly waspish metropolis, I realized that it also happened to be only a few yards from the trail. As I continued to survey the landscape for the next several minutes, dozens of hornets flew wildly about their ominous, palatial city. I couldn't fathom how many inhabitants might be dwelling there in that moment.

When I returned to town the following day, I reported the location of this particular nest to the forest service. Because of its close proximity to the trail, such a huge hornet habitat could pose a serious danger to any hikers venturing through the area. If anyone were attacked by such a potentially large number of those fierce, aerial gladiators, especially while being several miles from the nearest road access, chances of a successful rescue would be slim at best. However, thanks to our local park rangers, the nest was moved promptly and was no longer there the next time that I visited the falls a week later.

Several years after my grandmother first started telling me about her various bee stories, I came to rent an average-sized raised-ranch out of the early 1960s that was located about seventy miles north of New York City. Situated on the cul-de-sac of a quiet road, the area of my already-scant front lawn was reduced even further in size by a hefty old oak, three younger maple trees, and one formidable hemlock.

In back of the house (above the ground-floor entrance) there was a pleasant little balcony suspended overhead. It had been added on years after the building had first been constructed. This deck overlooked my shady and secluded backyard—a cool, grassy hideaway sealed off from the rest of the world by acres and acres of untended forestland.

When asking my next-door neighbor if there was anything worthwhile to be found in

those woods, he replied by mentioning half-jokingly that if I ever dared to delve into that *jungle*, I might get lucky and eventually come across a couple of scenic overlooks.

Shortly after he had told me about this potential point of interest, I decided to take up his challenge and see whether or not I could find the place he had mentioned earlier. The trudge into that nearly impenetrable quagmire didn't please me in the least and definitely was no joking matter. At that point in my life, I virtually had no experience with bushwhacking; and the miles of dense thickets mixed with larger trees were teeming with bracken, brambles, and underbrush.

After having endured a claustrophobic, shirt-shredding, skin-scraped half-mile of heavy-duty trudging, I finally found those two outcrops just before the terrain suddenly dropped off at the edge of a cliff. My neighbor warned me about the views possibly being blocked now by years of continuous tree-growth in the area. However, much to my delight there still remained satisfying vistas to be enjoyed, including a small lake surrounded by blankets of trees and other greenery in every direction.

Once I had wallowed laboriously to this spot several times, I soon came to the conclusion that it definitely would be a worthwhile project to forge a footpath between lawn and ledge. After a few weekends of cutting, clearing, and even building a few stone steps here and there, I then continued to grade the trekking surface until a reasonable pathway took shape. The end results of all my efforts turned out to be quite pleasing and beneficial. I spent many pleasant afternoons on those shaded rocks writing, meditating, and composing much music.

On one particularly hot and humid day in early afternoon, I decided to go to the cliff and meditate for an hour. I wanted to spend some quiet time before beginning my seven solid hours of nonstop teaching. That particular day's schedule would begin at three o'clock and continue until late in the evening. So shortly after having lunch, I headed out into the woods.

Because of the extreme heat, I wore a pair of shorts and nothing else. As was often my custom in those days, I ran lightly down the trail in bare feet, leaving shoes and socks at home. After a few brief minutes, my arrival above the cliff was greeted by the simple beauty and quieting peace that I had come to expect from the place. Instantly sitting myself down on a large, smooth slab of multi-colored rock, I calmly closed both eyes, inhaled deeply, and began an eternal hour of ritualized stillness.

Once I had finished meditating, several timeless moments were spent absorbing everything enticing my senses currently. There was a bright and buoyant sun ablaze (edging

itself imperceptibly across an expectant sky at midday), fragrantly soft breezes soothing my increasingly sunburnt skin, and a serene panorama of the valley shimmering in the distance.

Endless flows of indistinct voices murmured across that landscape, saturating every ounce of the abounding atmosphere caressing me. Human utterances, birds chirping and squawking, and diverse animal cries concealed themselves deep among the incalculable textures and colors of those softened, impressionistic terrains. This was the extent of the world's busyness facing my solitary perch upon the bluff that day. Consequently, I had no desire to leave at all.

It therefore wasn't without a good deal of reluctance that I finally convinced myself to begin the return home. After all, I soon had to be ready for my first student of the day. So I slowly stood up and moved tentatively away from my granite and quartz-ridden dais; but there was something that kept tugging at me to stay awhile longer.

Consequently, in mid-stride I turned back towards the lake and stood quietly for several minutes more. With my eyes closed, I could feel and hear a gentle wind whispering past my face. But soon thereafter, I became aware of another sound. It was a more caustic drone gradually increasing in loudness and intensity and seemed very much out of place within that idyllic setting. Furthermore, it appeared to be emanating simply out of the blue.

At last, it occurred to me what I must be actually hearing. An enormous humming and buzzing began to saturate every inch of auditory space surrounding me. Instantly, I asked myself:

Is there a swarm of bees nearby? There must be…

Just after posing the question, and while answering it to myself immediately thereafter, I felt a surge of tingling sensations running relentlessly across my legs. As soon as I looked downward, a startling sight struck me like a bolt of lightning. Every inch of my arms and legs, hands and feet, my waist and chest were covered with layer-upon-layer of hornets—not bees at all!. Hundreds of them (or maybe even thousands) clad my nearly-naked body. They wrought an unimaginably thick plate of wriggling, buzzing, and biting armor upon my physical self!

The moment I detected their virtual omnipresence, a silent scream resounded inaudibly within my mind, and at least one of those sizeable creatures sensed that muted reaction emanating inside of me nonetheless. Consequently, I was immediately stung twice at the base of my right thumb. Without waiting for any more of them to strike, I flipped myself around and

flew away homeward as fast as feet could fly.

Yet, after the initial shock passed through me, I was then transformed in a flash into another state altogether. The pair of familiar, invisible hands became apparent to my senses once again as they enveloped my entire person with electrifying stillness. It appeared as though those waspish compatriots clinging to me were equally immeshed in that mesmeric flow. Not even one of them stung again, despite how quickly I was transporting this multitude of winged companions away from their nest.

As *all of us* made our whirlwind flight back along the pathway through dense thickets and brushwood, those grace-filled hands guided my head upward toward the forest canopy. Emanating from within that dense arboreal ceiling, a glowing globe of light appeared; and out of its indescribable brilliance, I gradually could see Granny M smiling down on me.

There were honey bees swarming all around her, and she gently began waving them out the door. Devoid of even a moment's hesitation, my own hands uncontrollably started to imitate her gestures. Instantly, I began to brush myself lightly across arms, chest, and even portions of my back and shoulders while maintaining a maximum stride towards the safe haven of home.

Continuing to wave my arms gracefully, I spoke softly to those wild winged fellows who were still affixed to my body. Repeatedly, and without fear, I said to them with a love that rose up inexplicably from within:

Fly away now and go in peace.

While continuing back to the house as fast as my legs would take me, it eventually became clear that while I was lingering upon the ledge for those few, final moments, I must have been standing over the entrance to an enormous underground nest. It also occurred to me that, except for the one or two ornery fellows who bit me twice just before I decided to rush home, each of the other countless hornets—who quietly adhered themselves to my wiry, reddened, and overheated frame—remained subdued until ultimately flying away unnoticed.

I never knew when the last of them had actually departed. Not until reaching the yard did it dawn on me to check if any were still hanging on. With gratitude and relief, I found that all of my *buzzing buddies* were in fact gone. After all, during my speedy breakaway, I was aware of nothing other than that soothing vision of Granny M waving away my granddad's honey bees.

But once I went inside and climbed up the entry stairs to the living room, a sobering thought struck me. If I hadn't been able to disengage myself from that split-second reaction of

terror (when first becoming aware of those countless critters virtually encasing my whole body), chances are that I would have been seriously injured afterwards or even possibly killed.

If I hadn't already spent a significant number of years seriously engaged in practicing specific types of meditation, prayers, and affirmations—especially those nurturing the belief of miraculous transformations—any *jump* from supreme panic into a conjuring of my grandmother waving away the bees may not have been accessed so readily. (moreover, these practices also included strengthening the belief in my abilities to receive and accept anything that could be considered as spiritual assistance or divine intervention.) [51]

While still having Granny M's life-saving image appear to me in full view, I nevertheless might not have had the presence of mind to brush away gently this lethal swarm. It would have been so easy to submit instead to preexisting, well-rehearsed fears concerning all flying insects of the stinging or biting persuasion. Since my childhood terrors had been practiced diligently for many years (and if I had succumbed to them instead of heeding the guidance of Granny M), such mindlessly reflexive alternatives certainly could have led to a disastrous and irrevocable end.

When we look back into our individual lives, I am certain that most of us can recall at least one experience similar to the following situation that I will describe shortly. How many of us have been at a picnic, were lying on the beach, or simply lounging about the backyard when someone nearby was being chased by an aggressive yellow jacket or any other such intruders? On occasion, it probably even happened to us personally.

What usually tends to be one of the most predictable human reactions in this type of circumstance? Don't we normally get up quickly to ward off or flee these unexpected assailants? Common responses oftentimes include wildly flailing our hands, occasionally gasping or crying out in fright, and readily charging away aimlessly in zig-zag patterns to avoid what appears to be an almost-inevitability of being stung.

In my own experiences (aside from childhood situations where I too reacted just as the above-description indicated), there indeed were countless times when I also witnessed others

[51] I most definitely have believed in divine intervention throughout most of my life, but not the usual dualistic understanding of the expression: how God suddenly assists us from some remote corner of the cosmos, always inconceivably far away from wherever we happen to be. Instead, keeping in mind how Jesus insisted that *the kingdom of heaven lies within us*, these interventions merely became a conscious part of my very essence and remained forever close at hand.

In any case, all of us should consider such *intercessory events* as being an integral part of our inner domain. They forever await our practiced beliefs, faith, understanding, and demonstrations of love to become potent enough to activate their spontaneous *otherworldly intrusions* to reveal myriads of seemingly miraculous materializations at any time that we truly need them.

behaving precisely in this manner. But after discovering my grandmother's simple technique of gently and calmly waving away these buzzing creatures, I soon became confident enough with this technique to teach it to numerous people. More importantly, it became a way to demonstrate how we can modify our behavior almost instantly from being controlled by a dualistic reaction of dread and distress to a balanced state of surety, calm, and ultimately divine love.

There was one specific incident that especially comes to mind now. I was traveling on an interstate when I felt the need to take a break from driving. So as soon as there was a rest stop available, I exited the highway and parked in front of a scenic recreation area.

Close to where I had parked was a picnic table occupied by a family quietly eating their lunch. Suddenly, the youngest child let out a scream, dropped her sandwich on the ground, and began running franticly in circles around her family still seated on the bench. While she continued to be chased by a particularly aggressive yellow jacket, several more of its *brethren* also started pestering some of the other family members as well. Soon thereafter, the three smallest children began crying hysterically.

It was at this point that I got out of my car and came over to the girl who was still racing about in total panic. She nearly ran into me when I knelt down to meet her face-to-face and told her not to be afraid. Once she came to a complete standstill, I asked her if she would like to learn a little secret about how to tell bees and wasps to go away without stinging her? Immediately, she nodded with a surprised but curious look that quickly dissolved all traces of her fright erstwhile covering a tearstained face.

In response, I simply smiled brightly into her watery eyes and began explaining how whenever we run wildly and thrash our arms in the air, these tiny guys are alarmed by our huge and violent movements. It is we who must appear like crazy, out-of-control giants to them, and our frantic reactions only make them more uncertain of us and most likely cause these little creatures to feel threatened, frightened, and even angry in reaction to our own fear.

Then I mentioned about my granddad keeping beehives behind his house and how my grandmother showed me her simple method of telling the honey bees to go somewhere else. As I was recounting a short version of the tale about Granny M waving away the bees while trying to cook dinner, I finally said:

If any buzzing critters are flying too close to you, don't get upset. Simply raise up your

hand slowly and begin waving gently in the direction that you would like them to go.

I added further:

Although this trick doesn't work consistently with flies or mosquitos, I never have seen an instance when bees, yellow jackets, hornets, or other kinds of wasps didn't respond exactly as I had hoped. They always flew off right away.

However, I don't recommend that you go searching for any of these little *buzzers* just to try it out to see if it works. Remember, waving away bees and wasps isn't a game so we should never play around with it for fun. In fact, I always thought of my Granny 's waving method solely to be used as a last resort—when those tough little guys just won't leave us alone.

The only few times when I got stung after knowing about my grandma's handwaving routine was when I was accidentally standing near a beehive or hornets' nest without knowing it. In each of those situations, I had unintentionally wandered too close and wasn't aware of their presence. Since my appearance near the nest was probably seen as a real threat, one of them would fly out and usually sting me suddenly as a warning. But as soon as I thought to wave one hand slowly and carefully back away, none of the others would ever come out to bother me.

At the end of our conversation, I told the little girl one more thing:

When I was your age, bees terrified me too. I would run around and allow them to chase me every time I saw them. They often stung me on my arms, legs, and even on my face and neck; and it only happened that way because of how I reacted with panic and fear. I probably scared them more than they scared me. But once I learned how to be calm in their presence, they almost never bit me again. And as I said before, the only times I was stung after that was when I stood too close to their nest or beehive.

Remember, within every bee or wasp neighborhood, there are those among them who are soldiers defending the entire hive or nest. Their job is like a policeman who warns and protects everyone else from dangers coming too close to home. If they detect any possible threat nearby, they quickly shoot out and attack the intruder. Unfortunately, this means

that if we stand too close to their hive, a single guard might sting us to alert the others and chase us away at the same time.

By now, the entire family had calmed down and all of them were listening to my story intently. At this point, the yellow jacket that had been bothering her just a few minutes ago once again came zooming in between the both of us. Instantly, the girl's eyes began welling up with tears while reflexively jerking her body further away from her alleged tormenter.

However, as I projected a big grin in her direction, I also asked her simply to watch what I was doing and copy my every move. Not only did she reproduce my swaying arm motions perfectly but the entire family also was imitating me as well. There still were some yellow jackets who persisted in investigating what all of the family had been eating for lunch.

So the mother, the father, and all five children began practicing what Granny M taught me several years earlier. Everyone of them started smiling with satisfaction and amazement when the uninvited little guests quickly flew away from their picnic table. It only took a few seconds before the entire brigade of yellow jackets completely disappeared from sight.

Once this had been achieved, both parents beamed with delight and expressed their appreciation to me. The dad's first words of gratitude were:

Thank you for the wonderful lesson. It's truly amazing!

After that, his wife chimed in with a slightly puzzled expression on her brow:

But how does it work? Is this just a trick?"

After assuring her that it wasn't a gimmick or any kind of *magic*, I added that this outcome merely demonstrated how powerful a simple change in attitude and action cannot only transform how we feel about the world around us, but it also confirms how the world can alter its responses towards us.

Although bees, every variety of wasps—including hornets—and all other flying insects interact with each other, they obviously don't use verbal language like we do. However, this isn't to say that there are not other explicit means by which they communicate among themselves, nor does it signify that there are no ways in which we can readily express ourselves to them either.

If we carefully observe their regular activities, much of their lives is spent in flight. But they only fly in reasonably straight lines when moving off to other destinations. Otherwise,

when feeding or interacting with others of their kind, they move in complex circular, zigzag, or partially hovering motions.

Aside from their varied changes in buzzing sounds, do they also communicate with an assortment of complex gesticulations? After all, humans do not converse exclusively with spoken words. We also use hand gestures, facial expressions, and other forms of body language—many supported by both precise and imprecise movements. Only the most unobservant of our species wouldn't detect similar interactions among other animals as well.

Recently, a close friend mentioned a comparable instance of his own. However, it didn't involve bees or wasps. He and his wife live in the Pacific Northwest and they have raised parakeets for many years. Not too long ago they were trying to figure out a way of taking their sick *Grey Bird* out of her cage to administer some medication.

They attempted to reach in and take hold of their ailing companion and bring her out with their hands. But she had become so frail that they were concerned about injuring her. So they instead began waving a hand slowly towards the center of the room and she readily flew out of the cage in the appropriate direction.

Once medication had been introduced, they then wondered how to get *Grey Bird* back into her little birdy apartment safely. But the answer now had become obvious. Soon a gentle hand was gesturing towards the cage and—in compliance to this simple, non-threatening motion—she took a few quick hops and amicably bounced into the enclosure with no hesitation whatsoever.

This anecdote is in stark contrast to most domestic bird stories of which I have heard in the past. Moreover, it definitely is unlike the majority of encounters I have witnessed firsthand where some of my friends and acquaintances were attempting to round up their pet canaries, mynahs, parrots, parakeets, and a wide variety of other *feathered companions* who temporarily escaped from their cages. While recalling these instances, I still cringe when reminded of how these people ran around their houses desperately trying to *recapture* even a single bird. Yet equally unsettling, they often would grab their avian buddies roughly in a possibly hurtful manner just to bring them back into their restrictive enclosures.

Even Granny M had a parakeet that frequently was chased to exhaustion before the poor creature could be put back into her birdcage once more. If only my grandmother had been able to recognize a resemblance between those particular situations with her parakeet and the problem that she regularly faced decades earlier coaxing swarms of honey bees out of her

kitchen. A simple wave of the hand to her beloved little *Birdie* might have spared both of them an enormous amount of anxiety and confusion for the more than two decades that they lived together.

As we reflect upon all of our past actions, interactions, and reactions to anything in either the inner or outer world, it would be well to remember how many times that personal circumstances can change appreciably after adjusting (even slightly) our attitudes, intentions, or behaviors—either for better or for worse. In the aforementioned story with that family picnicking at the interstate rest area, their transformational shift interacting with the local yellow jacket population was no different from when I found myself covered with hornets and suddenly remembered Granny M's technique of gently waving them all away. As was stated earlier, if I didn't decide to coax them from my body in the serenest possible manner, it wouldn't have been unlikely at all for me to have been stung to death instead.

There are so many crucial moments in each of our lives when we could conceivably stave off serious conflicts or disasters. If we only allow ourselves to be sufficiently mindful and loving, it then becomes possible to perceive balanced and cathartic alternatives to previously weedy behaviors, intentions, and outlooks. By so doing, it is feasible to take quantum jumps into new and ostensibly miraculous conditions for ourselves and others.

As always, when I refer to anything being *weedy*, the only thing being suggested is that weediness is when duality divides us into opposites and form an appearance or *illusion* of separateness. It manifests whenever we insist on struggling with each other, perceiving all else to be contrived as some sort of disparate force forever dividing and alienating our beings with every other being. This illusion prevents us from realizing and subsequently practicing our veritable, compassionate state of unity. Nevertheless, it is only after becoming conscious of this fact that we are able to perceive the eternal oneness we always have had with everyone and everything that is.

If we recall the recent scientific discovery mentioned earlier—discussed by Lisa Randall in her book *Dark Matter and the Dinosaurs*—the entire universe ostensibly was no larger than a grain of sand in the beginning. It has continued to expand to its current, seemingly incalculable vastness while unfolding into all material forms of structure. This comprises each of us, including every other sort of creature and seemingly inanimate object in existence.

Therefore, even at the most basic levels, we can now begin to fathom how the entirety

of humanity isn't only part of an infinite oneness philosophically or spiritually but also is a continually blossoming, apparently paradoxical emergence of that grand flower of oneness encompassing vast diversities within itself. Yet, it was derived from a single *cosmic seed*. It is from within this tiny granule that potentially infinite unity has burgeoned into all of humanity along with the entirety of every other aspect of quantifiable and unquantifiable reality.

Obviously, this includes all of the bees, wasps, and birds that were mentioned above. Through the practice of divine love, we once again can learn to coexist compassionately and even communicate with all else, including the buzzing yellow jackets swarming around our picnic lunch or our ailing parakeet needing to be guided back into her cage. All of these possibilities are part of the miraculous materializations that we can regularly practice metamorphizing into this immeasurable yet singular domain we have come to know as the blessed garden of mind.

IX.

While seedlings sprout and blossoms bloom...

When the true nature of all *jumps* is considered carefully, we will realize that every such jump appears to be nothing more than an abrupt and outwardly instantaneous, magical, mysterious, or even a seemingly impossible transformation. From the mundane gardener's point of view, these shifts also can be regarded as the moments when buds, leaves, and blossoms suddenly emerge. Such reconstitutions also manifest while the seeds—some days or weeks after first being planted in the ground—begin to sprout above the soil's surface.

Undeniably, there are subtle processes working before (and while) each developing part of any plant becomes visibly noticeable at the moment when it transforms into something apparent to the naked eye. Technologies (such as time-lapse photography and more recent forms of monitoring and documenting these changes) certainly have demonstrated that

countless, hidden transformations occur systematically throughout nature before they become recognizable to the naked eye. Powerful changes are constantly working throughout the various stages of plant development to promote the manifestation of each new component. However, most of us tend to take notice of only the most obvious aspects of any alteration towards complete and *matured* materialization.

From the mind gardener's perspective, this is also true with the numerous shifts that take place between thought and physical reality. Such a rationale could explain how the members of the family depicted in the preceding story were so terribly afraid of those yellow jackets seeming to assail them. If they continued with that type of fearful and frantic attitude, it is likely that at least one of them would have been stung in the next few minutes.

My childhood reactions to wasps and bees assuredly caused me to be the recipient of many stings thanks to my anxiety-inducing beliefs and behaviors then. It was only after deliberate changes in attitude, conviction, and ensuing actions did the frequent onslaughts from buzzing assailants actually cease permanently; and if anyone had been with me the first time I had successfully waved away the yellow jackets investigating my lunch, it also might have appeared to them as a miraculous moment occurring in merely *a twinkling of an eye*, with absolutely no preparation required.

Mostly everyone sees just the end results, and we tend to be unaware of or ignore entirely the intricate course that all thoughts and ideas travel towards their complete actualization. Perhaps, it is the reason why seemingly sudden, unexpected, and profound outcomes (including events deemed as tragedies, disasters, wonders, and miracles) regularly take most of us by surprise; and in that shock we often react by sowing more dualistic seeds. This occurs despite the fact that all such instances also offer the unquestionable ability to *jump* into and remain within a more balanced and compassionate state of being.

However, such a statement doesn't imply that anyone who is stricken with catastrophes or blessed with awe-inspiring transformations shouldn't be filled with what most people might consider to be the expected emotional responses of the moment. If calamity besets us, appropriate reactions obviously would include those of grief and the feeling of profound loss. Equally, if a life-saving occurrence liberates us instantaneously from the clutches of ruin, our responses probably will incorporate those of elation, relief, and gratitude.

After all, we are only responding to a dichotomy already in action. Any radical event takes us to the furthest edge of one side of that *cosmic seesaw*, and our response to this extreme

draws us back towards a state of equilibrium existing at the seesaw's fulcrum.

But it is how we continue practicing subsequently to sustain or (preferably) to balance those reactions that determines whether we will transcend the dualistic inclinations within our thoughts, our actions, and any other manifestation-inducing mechanisms we utilize. If we aren't capable of maintaining balance in every situation, we will then continue swinging undeniably and predictably to the opposite side of the seesaw once more; and if we don't consciously transform all of our internal and external practices with a sense of balance, oneness, and divine love, we will undeniably perpetuate even further the dissemination of dualistic seeds.

These are the most extreme instances of all those that we encounter each day of our lives. In most cases, the rocking back and forth from one side of the seesaw to the other is considerably less severe, more subtle, and not so easy to detect. Casual worry, carelessness in thought and action, unkind words and deeds, foolish or misguided optimism, laziness, petty jealousies, and a myriad of other potentially dichotomous endeavors can also easily set in motion that proverbial seesaw.

Within every mindless thought, half-baked idea, offhanded emotion, unwitting intention, and misguided belief—along with similar, subsequent actions, reactions, and interactions—a dancing of opposites (the primary function of our misbegotten seesaw) always remains the most likely impetus for everything that germinates within us and manifests around us. It also may be well to remember that duality **is** the veritable seesaw itself and the instigator of every other weed in existence.

Likewise, it is important to consider that prolonged practice of even the most random and seemingly unintentional rudeness, spite, or insincerity (as well as the innocuous frailties just mentioned in the previous paragraph) has the capacity to initiate our *jumping* into more complex and seemingly irreversible stages of such dichotomous *weediness*. Therefore, it is important for anyone aspiring to be a conscious gardener to practice recognizing all of these as much as we are able (preferably, on a daily basis). An initial step for developing the needed ability to consciously and continuously expose the weeds of duality to ourselves is to develop a habit of regularly reciting an affirmative statement—perhaps, something like this:[52]

[52] Please remember that all samples of affirmations and prayers found within this text (in addition to each recommendation I have made about meditating) are solely suggestions. They are examples of practices that I have found to be helpful during various stages of my life. However, because of their being only models of what appeared to work for me—at least temporarily—others may discover that they also seem to be worthwhile, either for many years or for only a much briefer period. In some cases, certain individuals may discover entirely different and more suitable practices for their own

I invoke, affirm, accept, believe in, and give thanks for my capacity to identify all thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions that create any dualities; and I also have the insight to transform them instead into the blessed seeds of divine love.

In other words, we should be asking ourselves about what we have thought, emotionalized, intended, believed, and taken action upon in every instant of our lives that goes against the powerful definition of divine love, which was introduced earlier.[53] Then, after declaring our facility for identifying all those potential weeds, it is equally important to state that we can also readily distinguish them from all thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions purposely instilled with compassion and have foresight to select only them when sowing our consciously selected seeds of thought within our own minds.

Additionally, any of us who decide to practice balance, oneness, and divine love mindfully as conscious gardeners cannot later fulfill the weeding process merely by ripping out those dichotomous thoughts and throwing them away. By doing this, we merely perpetuate other dichotomies in the world such as creating and destroying or collecting and discarding.

Instead, it would be beneficial to visualize conscious weeding as a process that allows all undesirable elements we feel compelled to discard or cast away to be instead transformed and reborn through a mindful process of compassionate healing—a sacred transmutation of sorts. We should always keep in mind that each weedy duality ever to exist is nothing more (or nothing less) than an occasion when love falls out of balance.

Consequently, we truly shouldn't cast any bits of this *damaged* love away. Even if such an action were actually possible, where would we dispose of these injured fragments of our being? There are no garbage dumps or mentally contrived trash heaps where we might conveniently stash the weeds—nor is there a need for metaphoric landfills or mentally contrived incinerators residing in the consciously tended garden of our mind. Within true oneness, nothing is ever divided from anything else. Separation is an inconceivable violation of oneness, and such

---

circumstances, so my suggestions might best be set aside for a possible time in the future when they might prove to be the best method for proceeding forward at that juncture.

One of the chief purposes of writing this book is to convey techniques and protocols that proved to be the most beneficial for my own life. Regardless, some readers may find other options more effective for their own circumstances. Therefore, think of my recommendations as nothing more than a roadmap. Although my own preferred *routes* will be highlighted on this map, no doubt there will be many people who will find other pathways more suitable and expedient for them to use.

[53] "Love is patient, love is kind, it is not envious. Love does not brag, it is not puffed up. It is not rude, it is not self-serving, it is not easily angered or resentful. It is not glad about injustice, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends."

a partition exists only as a part of more weed-infested illusions of duality.

It therefore would be useful to contemplate the notion that everything perceived (or not perceived) is an indelible part of this oneness and its infinite realm. If we believe that the only way to rid ourselves of weedy thoughts—along with the tainted ideas, intentions, emotions, and actions stemming from them—is to toss them away, bury them deep within our minds, or simply deny when we engage with them on a daily basis, we accomplish nothing other than further actuating more weeds.

Dualistic offspring will forever persist in cropping up in any space created by this sort of erroneous method of *gardening*, and all efforts of casting out weeds from the mind garden continue to be futile, even if we are actively trying to get rid of them. Weeding therefore should be envisioned as a process of reparation rather than one of actual disposal.

Love out of balance needs to be restored to its true nature, not eradicated. This is done simply by thinking of our weeding process as a form of *recycling* as well as *clearing*—thereby transforming our *weedy* dualistic thoughts, ideas, intentions, emotions, and actions back into being exclusive examples of compassionate love. In a way we might think of this weeding/recycling process as the ultimate form of composting.

While we practice converting (or recycling) everything we think and do into balance, oneness, and divine love, it is also needed to affirm continually the dissolution (or weeding out) of each illusory thought, idea, emotion, intention, belief, action, or condition immediately beforehand. This transformational decomposition of any weed will compost and fertilize all potential divine attributes, allowing them to make a *quantum jump* back into the blossoms of a compassionate love reborn.

In our minds, it is crucial to envision a shift of all delusions out of their current weedy condition. By consciously injecting love into all dichotomies we wish to remove, they can actually rematerialize as the divine attributes they were always intended to be before being thwarted by our practicing the separating imbalances of dualistic illusion.

As we envision ourselves casting out all weeds from our individual and collective lives, we also must simultaneously transform them into divine love merely by visualizing, affirming, accepting, believing in, and practicing the implantation of this shift. And we should do this on a regular basis. This can be considered as the practical application of composting our mental weeds into seeds of divine love. The effects of these simple actions will then be able to spread

throughout the cosmos as the healing that balances and blesses all else that exists.[54]

Even when we now may not fully recognize or admit that this capability dwells within us, by regularly making a commitment and announcing a sincere intention to ourselves to begin practicing regularly this form of weeding and recycling, we already are making an active affirmation of sowing new types of thought seeds, and such seeds can awaken an awareness to identify the weeds that need to be cleared out and instantaneously transmuted into their truest nature. This simple declaration not only acts as the conscious planting of compassionate thought but also develops within us a heightened awareness to detect and remove all weeds through *composting*—the process of bringing them back into divine love.

By practicing such restorative statements, we are consciously declaring repeatedly our intentions and taking actions of balancing and healing in doing so. These simple steps are no different than the process that Signor Martini related to Frances Mayes in *Under the Tuscan Sun* when he spoke of the proposed train between Venice and Vienna:

> They built these tracks before there was a train in existence that could make the trip. They built it because they knew someday the train would come….

As we practice removing and composting the weeds of our existence, we merely are laying the tracks for our own sought-after train—one with an *engine* to transform our lives fully into divine love.

[54] If we find these procedures less than credible, it would be well to remember that any current disbelief in a perfected condition merely is caused by our well-practiced convictions in all things dualistic. If we wish to change this weedy *state of being*, it is essential to begin weeding out, composting, transmuting, and replanting our old, dichotomous beliefs and actions into alternately cathartic ways of perceiving and fertilizing our newly selected seeds with appropriately reinforcing thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions of compassion.

X.

Shielding our dreams as newly planted seeds and guiding them to fruition...

Thus far, we have introduced the gardener's tasks of weeding, planting, and fertilizing, and now let us discuss the procedure for fencing and sheltering thought seeds while still residing deep within the fertile soil of our minds. It is essential to protect our fledgling thoughts while they still exist merely as hopes and dreams.

Frequently, when people come up with an innovative plan, a bright idea, or the means to suddenly fulfill a heartfelt wish, they can become so excited and enthusiastic concerning their discovery that they immediately tell others about what they are attempting to accomplish. Oftentimes, the responses of those with whom they have shared their expectations are less than encouraging. Even when others want to be supportive, their unconscious and suppressed doubts, fears, judgments, jealousies, resentments, and a host of other counterproductive thoughts (and emotions stemming from those thoughts) can interfere with or destroy even the strongest aspirations from manifesting; and while doing this, they are also setting into motion still more duality.

While in the early stages of my adult life, I found myself experiencing this phenomenon in a seemingly systematic and predictable fashion. There were numerous occasions when I was totally ecstatic about upcoming events that appeared as though they were definitely about to happen. With great exuberance, I then would share the good news with certain venerable members of my family. As soon as I revealed to them any of these auspicious tidings, they would regularly respond with doubting comments, suspicions, worries, and even sarcastic put-downs.

At the precise moment when their unenthusiastic rejoinders resounded within my ears, it also felt as though all of my hopes were suddenly sucked right out of the top of my head; and in their place, an overwhelming feeling of futility engulfed me instantaneously. It always manifested as a compelling sense that none of what I had just revealed to those around me would actually happen now—no matter how definite each prospect seemed just a moment

earlier.

In each case, when I made the mistake of telling others about the exciting and hopeful changes in my life that were about to take place, even when key individuals involved had already assured me of the certainty of those changes (oftentimes in writing), I would then receive an unanticipated message that none of what was promised or offered was going to take place after all. In several situations, the excuses given for the sudden cancellation of our plans were often vague, disingenuous, nonsensical, and even bizarre.

After observing this weird phenomenon occur repeatedly in the same manner for several years, I finally felt the need to discuss the matter with a couple of close friends who were also keenly perceptive individuals. Surprisingly, they both exclaimed having had similar experiences when they overenthusiastically revealed to others their own hopes, dreams, and even seemingly definite changes (which were understood as being positive and hopeful events just about to happen).

Instead of waiting until those shifts had already transpired, they too chose to let the proverbial *cat out of the bag* prematurely; and as a result, nothing that they prematurely spoke about to others ever came to fruition. In later years, I also mentioned these conundrums to countless students and acquaintances and many of them reported similar outcomes.

Prior to conferring with any of these individuals, I initially believed that the apparent correlation between sharing my secret aspirations with others and the subsequent disappointments felt thereafter was nothing more than an excuse to mollify my own disappointments. Moreover, I suspected this assumption came from something that was fabricated rather than being real. After all, wouldn't any logical person on earth conclude such a notion to be nothing more than a contrivance?

However, after discovering that my friends also couldn't seem to bring about their plans whenever they prematurely exposed their ideas outside of themselves, I then decided to experiment with something that I had never tried before. I would keep all of my dreams and ambitions to myself until after they had been fully realized in the physical realm. By doing this, I unwittingly was protecting all of my goals from the external world so they could nourish and grow without the interference of opposing thoughts. Otherwise, all sorts of deleterious input (including both the individual and collective judgments and opinions of anyone other than myself) could no longer be a possible cause if my hopes and dreams still didn't unfold as planned.

As a mind-gardening novice at the time, I slowly began to comprehend how important it was to *shelter* and *protect* each consciously-formed idea in its embryonic stages and discovered that silence and even secrecy were the fences oftentimes needed to shelter and protect them. When it was truly necessary to share my dreams with another person before they had matured into something manifestly tangible, what I should reveal and to whom I might reveal it required prayerful discernment on my part. In the end, once those aspirations had been actualized, I could then celebrate the accomplishment by sharing those happy outcomes with everyone else.

We might think of such a final disclosure to the outside world as the conscious gardener's *Day of Thanksgiving*. That is to say, after initially clearing a plot and then planting seeds of thought (as well as fertilizing, watering, sheltering, and weeding them until their seedling, sprouts, and sapling *ideas* have blossomed and ripened into the mature fruits of materiality), then it would be appropriate to impart the knowledge of our miraculous bounty onto others. While doing this, we can also celebrate, rejoice, and express much gratitude for the ample harvest emerging as a grace to us all.

To illustrate further the need for shielding our *newborn* thoughts, I introduced earlier in the chapter a part of the silly little story about a farmer who had just finished planting his cornfields. I have frequently recounted this to many of my students and here it is in its entirety:

> After many long days of toil, a farmer finally came into the house for dinner one night and announced to his wife: “The corn's in!” He didn't take her out to the fields, shine a flashlight at the newly tilled dirt, and dig up each seed to prove that he actually had been sowing seeds all week. Nor did he go and unearth those hidden kernels just to prove his actions to anyone else either. Even when his crazy neighbors stopped by and declared that they could see not even the slightest traces of corn in his fields, he simply smiled and said, "You'll see 'em there soon enough".
>
> Those brainless busybodies recently moved up from the city and bought the house next door. Obviously, they knew nothing about farming or country living in general but were terribly opinionated about their neighbor's cornfields nonetheless. One night, at the monthly town meeting, they accused him of being a fraud and a liar. After all, he specifically told them that it took him days to put the corn in and yet the fields still were completely empty.

In front of the entire community, they declared triumphantly that he was no real farmer: "He's just a lazy bum who's trying to fool the rest of us villagers. Wanting everyone to believe he's out in his fields working all day, he pretends to plant corn in those acres and acres of mud and dirt he calls a farm. But we aren't fooled by his lies. Actually, we told him that if he wasn't willing to take us out to show us where every corn seed lay, we were going to expose him to the public as a fraud! If he won't dig all of them up to prove his claim to be true, he doesn't deserve to live among such fine folk and he should be made to leave town."

Needless to say, the townsfolk were speechless. Dozens of jaws dropped simultaneously while others just rolled their eyes, shook their heads in disbelief, and groaned in utter disgust. But one of the old timers thought the whole situation was so hilarious that he couldn't contain himself any longer. He started slapping his knees, stomping his feet, and roared with uncontrollable laughter.

Once his irresistibly contagious bellowing broke the stilted silence in the hall, nearly everyone else attending that meeting followed suit. Their amusement was equally infectious and uncontainable. Quickly, the details of what transpired there spread throughout all of the neighboring villages. In fact, nothing could control the widespread, sidesplitting hysteria for weeks—not until the entire county actually laughed the newcomers right back to the big city from whence they came.

There isn't a gardener on the planet who would consider digging up his or her fields in order to refute such ignorant accusations. In fact, it should come as no surprise that this particular farmer rightfully would defend his crop from such idiocy at all costs. No one was going to unearth his corn for any reason. Such an untimely exposure certainly would cause the seeds to weaken or die. Then, those antagonistic buffoons living *down-street*[55] might actually have convinced other naïve or ignorant folk that there never had been any corn in his fields in the first place.

The same could be said about the expectant mother who was challenged about her assertion of being pregnant. If she foolishly permitted anyone to open up her belly to prove

[55] A vernacular expression common to northern New England meaning: down the road.

that she was bearing a child, she and her unborn infant might die from such invasiveness; and if the fetus died, she could then be accused of fabricating the idea of having an actual baby. In any type of pregnancy, seeds of the womb must be protected, fenced, shielded, and nurtured right up until the moment of birth. Even in the formative years, shielding and protecting is vital for the survival of every fledgling creature.

This is true with anything that grows, not just in cultivating cornfields or child-bearing. All germs that are sown or planted should be guarded and sheltered until they can be harvested. Therefore, it would be prudent to consider the serious consequences before unwittingly unveiling our own *unborn* dreams for others to witness. This conscious *fencing* or *sheltering* of our fledgling thoughts could be considered as an essential tool of the conscious gardener if we wish for our deepest hopes and visions for the future to bloom into a relevant portion of what appears to be outward manifest reality.

There is one final task we should consider as we practice conscious gardening. Pruning or trimming is no different than giving our thoughts an occasional *haircut*. As these thoughts grow into ideas, intentions, emotions, beliefs, and actions, it is crucial to examine their development continually. If they seem to be forming in ways that divert from their truest nature (in other words, falling short of expressing and manifesting our intentions within the definition of divine love), then it is important to discover how we can modify, trim, prune, or cut away all that is unbalanced, unbalancing, or superfluous.

As any plant grows, it readily develops shoots that divert energy and vitality away from the main stalk. This ultimately weakens and diminishes its overall growth unless these extraneous portions are removed and subsequently added to the compost pile. Once these discarded elements break back down into their rudimentary form, then they possibly can be reintroduced as fertilizer for those *groomed* plantings that still remain.

XI.

Mindfully sowing seeds of mindfulness…

Before concluding this section on *conscious gardening*, we should recall and reexamine the questions that were posed in the initial paragraph of this chapter:

> *To be a conscious gardener we must forever practice consistently, correctly, completely, and consciously of course; but how do we accomplish this? When are our practices truly conscious, consistent, correct, and complete? What tools should we employ to facilitate such a process, and will the same procedures work for everyone, and in every instance?*

As we begin to consider all of the essential tools needed to facilitate our quest into the garden of our minds and assume the role as its cognizant caretakers, we already may have realized the answers to at least one of these issues. Indeed, invaluable tools for conscious gardening have been discussed throughout this portion of the book. Whether or not any of their specific procedures work for everyone, and in every instance, depends solely on how well we are able to establish divine love and its non-dualistic attributes as the cornerstone of all that we practice.

While we are practicing, how can we recognize that which is conscious, consistent, correct, and complete? To begin discovering (and then to master) the *Four Cs*, it is essential to develop the ability of *being present* anywhere, at any given moment in our lives. This type of awareness is the veritable threshold of consciousness. Once we have discovered how to practice consciously, then practicing consistently, correctly, and completely also becomes apparent.

This occurs because truly conscious practice is always consistent, correct, and complete! Indeed, genuinely consistent practice must be equally conscious, correct, and complete. Correct practice occurs when we are fully conscious, thereby being consistent and complete as well. We only can truly complete any practice if it is done consciously, consistently, and correctly. Thus, the *Four Cs* exist exclusively when each component is functioning fully. Otherwise, a dualistic counterfeit operates in its stead.

The term *being present* also is spoken of as the practice of *mindfulness* in Buddhism.

According to *Wikipedia*, mindfulness is:

> the intentional, accepting and non-judgmental focus of one's attention on the emotions, thoughts and sensations occurring in the present moment…

This means that we are always aware of everything that is transpiring around us as it's happening, whenever and wherever that may be. Rather than clouding ourselves with worrisome assessments of the past or by our suppositions concerning the future (or about things in far-away locations, or even those that are nearer at hand), we instead begin to notice everything in all-existing instances simultaneously, as if each one of them is occurring immediately around and within us.

An ageless Carmelite nun[56] from Ireland once described to me how she had prayed most of her life. When this deeply devoted, kind, and wise centenarian revealed her unpretentious process of prayer in a conversation we had decades ago, I realized that this was her personal approach to being mindful every moment of every day. When she told me about how she prayed, I don't recall whether or not she was also paraphrasing the words of one of her favorite saints out of history (after all, it was something she also did quite frequently:

> I pray when I wake up,
> I pray when I walk,
> I pray when I sit.
>
> When I laugh I pray,
> When I cry I pray,
> And especially when I'm arguing I try to remember to pray.
>
> I pray when I work,
> When I read,
> And I ask the Lord to help me pray whenever I sleep—
>
> Even while I'm dreaming…

[56] The Carmelite Order is a Roman Catholic ministry of mendicants established most likely during the twelfth century. The first monastery was founded on Mount Carmel in the Crusader States. Each member of this ascetic group is required to reside in an individual cell, adhere to vows of poverty and toil, and maintain complete silence after each evening Vespers Mass until morning Mass on the following day. The entire order also abstains from eating all types of meat except when severe illness occurs. Additionally, each member must engage in prescribed, extensive fasting.

Regardless of where she might have initially acquired this invaluable procedure, her unending sense of prayer definitely echoes the spiritual routines and sentiments of one of the great, revered icons in her order. It was Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection[57] who spoke through his seventeenth-century quill a similar sentiment regarding a life held in mindful prayer. He most likely scribbled down the following words at a simple bedtable in his austere, poorly lit cell. Yet, such musings still resonate powerful and warming insights that he has conveyed to us from a distant era long ago:

> The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament.

In the more recent decades of my life, I finally realized that through the mind-gardening tool of prayer, both this nun and Brother Lawrence indeed were illustrating the practice of *being present* (or mindful) in every moment of every day. They breathed out seeds of compassion with each breath that they took; and in this manner, they indeed broke down the illusions of time, distance, and space by merging each moment—wherever they happened to be and whatever they happened to be doing at any given time—with an endless stream of compassionate thoughts and words.

Prayer was their primary implement to fulfill such an accomplishment. Through this eternal activity, each of them demonstrated how to live in the veritable *Here* and *Now*. By obliterating all temporal and spatial delineations and boundaries with their ceaseless, all-encompassing prayer, this humble nun and devout brother forever sowed seeds of balance, oneness, and divine love into the world.

Years before I had been introduced to either of these two simple ascetics, I once heard that life should be an endless prayer. Certainly, they were living examples of this seemingly straightforward statement. Indeed, whenever any of us truly practice conscious gardening, our entire existence becomes the everlasting prayer, the all-consuming meditation, and the

---

[57] According to *Wikipedia*, Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection (c. 1614–1691) served:

> …as a lay brother in a Carmelite monastery in Paris. Christians commonly remember him for the intimacy he expressed concerning his relationship to God as recorded in a book compiled after his death, the classic Christian text, *The Practice of the Presence of God*.

universal affirmation of transcendence. From a ceaseless stream of thought, these unrelenting practices unfold into boundless, blossoming ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions. Hence, they can manifest as timeless, ubiquitous, and unifying love.

When we engage in being truly mindful, we become aware of our constant breath, of our hearts beating, of every fiber in our bodies. We hear every sound, see every sight, and smell every fragrance that surround us. However, to practice such things solely for their own sake is missing the point when we seemingly perfect these abilities. It is in the training of our being to be so in tune with every perceptible aspect of each second-by-second situation, that we also commence observing all that we think, feel, say, and do at any given time.

In every case, what good is a generous action if our thoughts are filled with judgment and we don't even recognize those thoughts as being judgmental? The following line expresses how true compassion is the veritable remedy for all of our judgmental inclinations:

> As rain falls equally on the just and the unjust, do not burden your heart with judgments,
> but rain your kindness equally on all.[58]

It is important to remember that true compassion cannot exist while our underlying feelings ooze with resentment and jealousy, regardless of whether or not we suppress those deep, malignant sentiments.

What advantage comes from a kind gesture if our accompanying, blind words are rude, insensitive, self-righteous, or supercilious? Furthermore, what empathetic thoughts have any worth if our subsequent actions afflict mindless hurt and abuse upon all with whom we supposedly empathize? Just because we profess to ourselves that we are spiritual and benevolent individuals doesn't deem it to be so without our constant, mindful, compassionate practice. Otherwise, all the above-mentioned contradictions will be allowed to materialize as nothing more than perpetuating a continuous outpouring of dualistic weeds.

In closing this chapter, I would like to mention the verse from I Corinthians 13 that was cited earlier. However, this time let us reflect upon it as a relevant paraphrase:

---

[58] This is a popular quote attributed to the Buddha but it apparently is not so. One scholar puts it this way:

> ...It seems to be an amalgamation of a quote from the New Testament and a loose paraphrase of the Lotus Sutra, which is a Mahayana scripture.

Regardless, the text beautifully expresses a viewpoint that is pertinent to the current chapter, so I have chosen to include it here.

Without practicing divine love mindfully in all of our thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions, we are nothing more than a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. In other words, we achieve only a proclivity for blowing an abundance of hot air into the atmosphere. Yet, through the mindful act of conscious gardening, we finally may rid ourselves completely of all such cacophonous clamor in each of our blessed lives.

– Part II –

Converting the weeds of duality
into divine love...

- Chapter 6 -

To Discern and Expose Maya's Veil

I.

A cosmic seesaw versus the tree of good and evil...

In order to identify and understand the extensive, limitless deceptions that this dichotomous world invokes, it is well to remind ourselves of that cosmic seesaw illustration as it clearly portrays how ever-increasing dualistic opposites compete endlessly with one another. On a moment-to-moment basis, these clashing, weed-proliferating forces struggle in a state of futility—seemingly forever. They simultaneously attempt to maintain their individual ends as the prominent point of any such mechanism, even while altitude on either side shifts without cessation.

Needless to say, neither far edge can remain dominant permanently. Should we nevertheless include this emblematic figure as part of our mind garden depiction? How might anyone justify a mere *playground pendulum* as the epitome of all garden weeds without mixing metaphors?

If we take ourselves back into the primordial Eden story, it becomes possible to imagine such a seesaw as being none other than an alternative depiction of our infamous Tree of Good and Evil. Even while continuing to be cloaked as a beguiling contrivance of simple pleasures and recreation, both contrary ends of that vacillating *lumber board* simultaneously reflects and consequently can be visualized as opposing boughs flourishing upon that Old-Testament tree.

Existing dualistically in each of an infinite number of parallel, multidimensional universes, all opposites continually rise and fall on either side of our eternally undulating, seesawing contraption just as they endure concurrently as metaphoric fruit hanging from those rivaling biblical branches. Regardless of which of these two metaphoric images we wish to employ, their diametrical *counterparts* constantly struggle with one another to be more than a mere allegorical illusion of dominance and legitimacy. Each antithetical constituent competes for individual recognition even while it feigns to be real.

Forever bounding up and down on that rough and rocking *plank of dichotomies,* all things that oppose everything else also dangle simultaneously, seductively, and paradoxically from litigious limbs stretching out of one contentious tree. Both the cosmic seesaw and the Tree of Good and Evil forever produce and sustain each opposing and contradictory manifestation that exist in life.

However, if we slice away both sides of that seesaw (or, in other words, chop down every branch, limb, and log from Eden's proverbial tree of duality), the only thing remaining would be the mid-mark for a playground gadget or the stub at the base of a once-thriving, legendary timber. Consequently, when we finally penetrate deeply into that seesaw's fulcrum or split open the tree stump's outer shell, an exceptional discovery can be made.

Previously hidden by such dichotomous devices, those formidable weeds of opposites (dualities overrunning the entire landscape of creation), the true nature of our mind garden now reemerges. Within the heart of this swinging seesaw's stationary center is concealed an axis of genuine balance, oneness, and divine love—forever and veritably alive. Yet, it ironically appears with no opposing ends to steady or support, because the delusion of see-sawing dichotomies dissolve in its presence.

Equally, from deep within each crack of that tree's remnant core surfaces Eden's other eternal, arboreal edifice: the Tree of Life. Any residual fruits resembling the good and the bad instantly are transmuted into blossoms of perpetually amalgamating love—an eternal love devoid of opposites. Both blessed seesaw fulcrum and the hidden, sacred tree have always been the essence of agape. They are the unifying source of everything seemingly separated from all else; and ultimately they are the actual sum of this all-inclusive garden of mind.

II.

"Seesawing" the sins of parents upon their children...

Throughout the following pages, I will attempt to describe many of the massive dualistic roots ensnaring entire civilizations and almost all of humankind since its inception upon this planet. Equally, the tiniest and seemingly innocuous buds cropping up in our daily humdrum activities nevertheless must also be discussed, because within them lie the seeds potentially capable of perpetuating all dualistic dysfunctions. When we allow these things to endure, they then disseminate through each of our ancestral lines in perpetuity so that the purported *sins of the parents* truly are begotten by their offspring for generations to come.[1]

Many years ago, I remember reading a simple but stunning phrase. Unfortunately, I no longer recall who the author was, but the words still ring out vividly in my mind:

> Sin is nothing other than error.

For anyone who truly aspires to be a conscious gardener, this is a vital distinction revealing the true nature of sin. Obviously, some sins seemingly are much more egregious and damning errors than others might be. But in the mind garden, all such *sins* are none other than dualistic

---

[1] This paraphrase is based on several Old Testament scriptures, especially the following four: Exodus 20:5, Exodus 34:7, Numbers 14:18, and Deuteronomy 5:9. The quoted passage below includes not only the seventh verse from the thirty-fourth chapter of Exodus but also includes the sixth verse as an introduction. This is part of the Exodus story where God reveals the Ten Commandments to Moses:

> The Lord passed before him [Moses], and proclaimed,
>
> > "The Lord, the Lord,
> > a God merciful and gracious,
> > slow to anger,
> > and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,
> > keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation,
> > forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,
> > yet by no means clearing the guilty,
> > but visiting the iniquity [sins] of the parents [father] upon the children
> > and the children's children,
> > to the third and the fourth generation."

Countless centuries later, William Shakespeare created his own rewording of the lines referring to this so-called *inherited iniquity* (or *sin*). It appeared in his play *The Merchant of Venice*, Act III, scene v and is believed to have been written between 1596 and 1599:

> "...the sins of the father are to be laid upon the children..."

weeds that undoubtedly are in the process of proliferating more dualistic weeds.

It is important to emphasize that (Biblically speaking) *sin* refers to:

> Missing the mark…

This definition has been interpreted by many as being something we do by choice, whereas *error* is oftentimes denoting things we do merely by accident—or unwittingly. An example of this I have heard frequently is when we make spelling mistakes or computational errors in math.

However, I believe this to be a highly semantical argument. The technical mistakes caused by deficiencies in our writing and mathematical skills is a far cry from the errors of judgment that can result in deception and other similar iniquities. Many times people (including numerous pastors, priests, and pious folk who I have known over the years) lie, cheat, steal, or commit even more egregious Biblical sins of *missing the mark* so automatically that they are also acting out these errors without even knowing what they are actually doing—or that is hoped to be the case.

Most notably, Christ compassionately acknowledged this about his persecutors even while he was dying upon the cross:

> Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.[2]

These types of sins are not necessarily deliberate and conscious choices but oftentimes are the result of unwitting fears, faithless motivations, and misguided judgments that have been practiced for so long that they have become a reflexive habit. Oftentimes, people will sin (or err) not because they are *bad* human beings but simply because they don't know any other way of behaving. In any event, sinning consciously—or unconsciously erring—is something that is regularly practiced over and over again.

Certainly, we must be able to distinguish between errors that are flaws in addition, subtraction, and knowing our times table and the more relevant errors to which I am speaking now regarding the mind garden. Consequently, we must also consider the following:

> *Does a person who has grown up in a culture of lies and deceit actually choose to commit the sin of lying simply because it is the only way of responding that has been available since birth?*

[2] From the New Testament, Luke 23:34.

It is important to remember what social psychologist Ap Dijksterhuis concluded in his research on imitating (practicing) whatever we happen to be exposed to by considering the following brief adaptation:

> *We can become good or bad simply by imitating what is in our environment. No matter how we think about the semantical applications of the word sin, Biblical sins are only a portion of the errors that create for us the dualistic weeds that keep us from the cathartic realizations that can and do occur when we live constantly within divine love.*

When we practice *erring* our way onto that cosmic seesaw or as we perpetually partake of the fruit found upon the Tree of Good and Evil, only one thing has occurred. Somewhere in our thoughts, ideas, emotions, beliefs, intentions, actions, words, or in any of our other thought extensions,[3] we have forgotten to love unconditionally—even if only for an instant. In all such cases, we now exist as weeds propagating new batches of potential weeds rather than tending to the garden by weeding them all away and sowing into the soil of our minds (and our outer lives as well) new aspects of divine love.

Even when we concede that this world is unquestionably riddled in duality, we often fail to realize how our own behaviors often resemble (or possibly duplicate and enhance) those characteristics of the dualistic weeds inundating all parts of existence. It is only possible for us to remove these illusions after we begin differentiating them from the actual fruit- and flower-baring plantings of compassion.

Yet, if we unwittingly weed away love, then the blights of illusion automatically will take its place and thrive. Any fertile and inexhaustible weed—determined to flourish throughout the garden—will be discovered as being particularly treacherous. Acknowledging this can prove to be a vital insight with which all of us should become intimately acquainted. Every single weed simply can manifest as nothing other than *error*, and all errors emanate from nowhere else other than our unconscious, unmindful thoughts.

So, there is always a simple formula for detecting even a single *sin* seducing us back into duality. We diligently must examine our thoughts, ideas, emotions, beliefs, intentions, words, and actions (being certain that none of them are implementing anything other than divine love

[3] Refer to explanation regarding thought extensions—or *mechanisms stemming from thought*. The discussion begins on page 139.

into the world). It also would be well to acknowledge all of our practices as prime models for all further teaching and learning, whether it is a pursuit manifesting solely within ourselves, or a back-and-forth activity between each of us and our spouses, our children, our friends, our associates—and even every acquaintance and passerby.

The reason that our iniquities, errors, and *sins* are handed down from one generation to another isn't just caused exclusively by a genetic transference. But it is also due to what we teach our children on a moment-to-moment basis during the course of ordinary living.

They constantly assimilate and imitate everything around themselves. This obviously comprises not only their general relationships within and outside of the family circle, but it especially includes how they observe us personally—as their parents—and how they become affected by or *infected with* our beliefs, our emotional reactions, our prejudices and fears, our likes and dislikes, and our social interactions with all other individuals. In the end, children often begin imitating many of our attitudes and behaviors outright, thereby we are transferring our errors to them (and possibly to their offspring as well) in the most subtle and undetectable ways possible.

Once again, it would be beneficial to recall the experiments of Ap Dijksterhuis. To highlight his findings here, a portion of what was cited earlier in Chapter 4 is restated now:

> ...imitation can make us slow, fast, smart, stupid, good at math, bad at math, helpful, rude, polite, long-winded, hostile, aggressive, cooperative, competitive, conforming, nonconforming, conservative, forgetful, careful, careless, neat, and sloppy.[4]

As we reread these lines, it should become apparent that this type of imitation is a regular method in which we inadvertently can transfer our errors into the psyches and behaviors of our children; and if they do not gain awareness of such *conversions* before they too become parents, then their progeny potentially will inherit the same or similar *sins*. This process of proliferating dichotomous weeds throughout the mind garden only can be halted by persistently affirming and acting upon a single, pervasive intention:

We must mindfully practice unequivocal and unconditional love without end...

[4] Dijksterhuis' words were quoted by Marco Iacoboni in his book *Mirroring People: The Science of Empathy and How We Connect with Others*. The Iacoboni excerpt is found on page 274.

III.

The proliferation of duplicitous weeds from all ages past to the current moment...

Let us recall the grappling, brawling, and endless tugs-of-war between innumerable opposites occurring endlessly throughout history. For example, there have been a multitude of rulers rising to and falling from power, civilizations cresting upon their triumphal golden age only to fade forever into obscurity, conquerors enslaving and subsequently being enslaved, abundance and health frequently overpowered by famine and disease, fame and fortune ending up as infamy and impoverishment, romantic love and matrimony collapsing into animosity, separation, and—in some extreme cases—murder or suicide.

Or instead, those bound by a miserable marriage or an unsuccessful career may retreat within an inescapable numbness of futility and regret, making it impossible either to confront the destructive issues-at-hand or to detach from them. Although these are just a handful of examples, such endless seesawing rides occur in one variation or another to every individual and collective that have ever existed in duality.

After World War II, there was a great ideal that had been imprinted upon the spirit of those living in the United States. To this day, we still refer to it as the *American Dream*. Through technological advancement, all citizens were supposed to be lifted into an egalitarian existence of peace and material prosperity. Poverty finally would be vanquished forever.

However, as a larger portion of the population began living this new life of abundance, blatant disparities also started to emerge. The great economist and writer John Kenneth Galbraith said it best in his literary masterpiece *The Affluent Society*:

> The family which takes its mauve and cerise, air-conditioned, power-steered and power-braked automobile out for a tour passes through cities that are badly paved, made hideous by litter, blighted buildings, billboards and posts for wires that should long since have been put underground. They pass on into a countryside that has been rendered largely invisible by commercial art... They picnic on exquisitely packaged food from a portable

> icebox by a polluted stream and go on to spend the night at a park which is a menace to public health and morals. Just before dozing off on an air mattress, beneath a nylon tent, amid the stench of decaying refuse, they may reflect vaguely on the curious unevenness of their blessings….

As Galbraith expressed his concerns while talking about these dichotomies in American life during the midportion of the twentieth century, environmentalist Joanna Macy emphatically speaks of how these disparities existing now, in the early twenty-first century, are painfully apparent on a global scale. In the following excerpt from a 2016 episode of NPR's weekly program *On Being*, she speaks of how humanity's obsessive materialism constantly jeopardizes our environment for more and more gadgets.

> …We've been treating the earth as if it were a supply house and a sewer. We've been grabbing, extracting resources from it for our cars and our hair dryers and our bombs, and we've been pouring the waste into it until it's overflowing.
>
> But our earth is not a supply house and a sewer. It is our larger body. We breathe it. We taste it. We are it, and it is time now that we venerate that incredible flowering of life that takes every aspect of our physicality….

However, most of us choose to visualize the scientific and technological changes of the past two centuries simply by focusing our attention on scenes of progress and prosperity such as the diverse assortment of panoramic, inner-city skylines while they forever burst heavenward. Their gigantic, glistening fountains of glass and steel seem to explode triumphantly and defiantly upon the vibrant, earthbound projections of otherwise-impermeable sunbeams. We also might selectively decide to remember the first photos of earth taken from space. We could marvel at those incredible, human achievements that have enabled each of us to witness our *green planet* from such a godlike perspective.

Additionally, we can boast about computerization of most technologies. Robotic engineering is creating a new population of nonhuman soldiers and slaves. The Internet has spanned the gap between the vast distances separating each of us while we inhabit every far-reaching corner of the globe. Furthermore, it appears equally to have the potential of bridging abysmally schismatic rifts between religions, ethnicities, and race—that is to say, if it instead doesn't widen and deepen those divides first.

But in contrast, how many of us have stood atop at least one of the thousands of mountainous garbage dumps that skirt an ever-increasing multitude of the skyscraper havens that we admire so greatly? Some of those interminable trash heaps are as wide as small cities themselves and are taller than many high-rise apartment buildings. Furthermore, thanks to countless corporate entities who have seemed to obsess over perfecting planned obsolescence just to force the rest of us to buy more and more of their products at an ever-accelerating rate, they have devised endless lines of disposable products that continually widen and heighten those mammoth scrapheaps (also at an alarming rate) with no end in sight.

Who among the living has walked through the wastelands of a Chernobyl or a Fukushima after those alleged clean-energy producing, nuclear power sources decimated land, water, and air with such pervasive toxicities that their poisoning effects will linger on for centuries (or possibly for millennia) into the future? Then there are the dozens of cities throughout the world that have to import their drinking water because their local reserves are either totally depleted or thoroughly poisoned. And we must not forget the countless, darkened, dead, and deadly vaporous lakes acting as repositories for the noxious waste products from the shale oil-fracking process.

Although enterprises causing such harm to the environment ironically help in providing nations of the West with less dependence on Mideastern oil monopolies, it also causes enormous harm to the communities existing within regions circumnavigating these toxic waste dumps. Widely contaminated drinking water and *breathing* air have caused a rapid rise in all sorts of cancer, respiratory disease, and birth defects—not solely for humans, but for every other living species as well.

For countless ages, majestic glaciers have graced numerous landscapes across our planet with their awe-inspiring presence. They have provided seemingly inexhaustible water sources and a habitat for a myriad of plant and animal species. However, in just a few short decades, all of them have begun to recede drastically due to technologically induced climate change. Many of them already have disappeared entirely; and in their wake, a succession of forsaken badlands have arisen—resembling moonscapes or hostile, lifeless panoramas imported from Mars. And during the past several years, climate scientists have predicted that by 2050 few or no glaciers will continue to exist anymore.

Besides this small yet startling sampling of destructive influences produced by our societal advancements, there are countless other examples that are equally alarming. Tens of

thousands of people die each year from pollution created by these human *achievements*. Species after species has become extinct due to these same poisonings emitted into (and upon) their previously inhabited domains of earth, water, and sky.

When I was a child, there were constant discussions on news programs, in school classrooms, and even during random conversations of acquaintances and passersby how the world was becoming dangerously overpopulated and that some serious changes needed to be made globally in order to stave off permanent disaster. This occurred when the worldwide population had just surpassed merely a billion people.

Then, over the course of several decades, I have noticed that—instead of curbing this overpopulation—governments are now advocating continually to their respective public audiences a contradictory litany. Even during the past year, I heard a conservative member of our federal government express a shocking mandate that is paraphrased below:

> *Because population growth is slowing down, it will adversely affect the economy. Our citizens must increase in order for prosperity to continue. We must make more babies!*

Such short-sighted claims are concocted not to protect the general population from continually facing successive environmental catastrophes in the future, but they only exist to indemnify the profits of the corporate elite and their chief shareholders. While promoting an ever-increasing buyer base, their sole incentive is to create more material-consuming constituents who will support the ongoing onslaught from our greed-driven free enterprise, suspiciously identical to all of those pyramid schemes that have long been branded as being wholly illegitimate and against the law. By convincing their carefully manipulated consumer *pawns* to purchase more and more of their material goods, these corporate entities are deliberately endorsing further overpopulation.

The chosen few at the top of this financial food chain are profiting beyond all hopes and dreams of avarice, while everyone else is consequently being subjected to rising poverty, disease, and despair. Undeniably, the most helpless and destitute among us always tend to be on the frontlines of the ever-increasing, ever-intensifying ecological disasters occurring globally.

The widely accepted, shortsighted, self-seeking corporate insistences on perpetual profiteering are based solely on the obsessive compulsion to addict ever-widening segments of society with an infinite variety of material goods that most people would be better off not having in the first place. Such untenable business models adhere to two of the basic tenets that their

sponsors probably learned during their first year at business school:

1. *Continually enlarge the company's customer base.*
2. *Extend the buying-life of each customer.*

During the mid-twentieth century (as was stated earlier), there was a great outcry warning about the ultimate unsustainability of the human population rising above a billion people. But instead of stabilizing this growth, our numbers have steadily increased to well over six billion now. Current projections are stating that in the not-too-distant future we will see this earthbound society surge to an unwarrantable membership of over nine billion.

Just a few short decades ago, many economic visionaries were tantalizing us with the future prospects of a lasting American Dream coming true. Politicians still entice their constituencies with such a vision—even while an ever-increasing portion of those supporters live in abject poverty. However, as the obsession over this ideal has spread across the globe, the blissful reverie of a populist utopia is quickly mutating into an infectious, worldwide American-styled nightmare.

Nowadays, there is substantial, empirical evidence to show that lower-income citizens living in the United States have little hope of achieving any dream of rising out of their inferior social ranking. During a recent radio program, I heard that the most likely place where the American Dream still has the best chance of being fulfilled wasn't in the Americas at all. Ironically, it actually lie in the relatively small European nation of Sweden (and by the time this book is eventually published, the *American Dream* manifesting in Sweden may no longer be tenable either). The diabolical, dichotomous seesaw continues to rock back and forth even while transforming, shifting, and remaking its opposites.

But the quandary obviously doesn't end here. The seeds of duality seem to be forever rising and burgeoning daily, and in every aspect of life. For example, when new medical cures are discovered, so too are previously unknown illnesses. Antibiotics were supposed to stamp out most types of infection only to be outmaneuvered by formerly nonexistent *superbugs* currently appearing to be impervious to all existing countermeasures.

On a recent news program offered by the BBC,[5] placebos used as experimental controls were mentioned to be now equally or more effective than the actual drugs being tested in a

[5] The British Broadcasting Corporation.

wide range of clinical trials. This phenomenon is occurring solely in the United States where such trials are required to be of a longer duration than anywhere else in the world. Interestingly, the accompanying data indicates that the effectiveness of placebos seems to improve substantially over time. This might suggest why these outcomes are happening solely in the American studies. Obviously, since numerous trials are finding placebo *controls* actually to be more beneficial than the medicines that pharmaceutical companies otherwise would be planning to market is causing quite a stir in the industry.[6]

---

[6] I would like to include my own, personal experience here. Because of its similarity to this more recent dilemma regarding placebos versus prescription drugs, I offer it now as a relevant sidebar:

Because I was perennially ill as a boy, my mother systematically carted me to one doctor after another. This included more than a dozen general practitioners and multiple scores of specialists. None of them were able to alleviate the serious, chronic infections that continued plaguing me for years. The typical doctor's appointment began by the attending physician asking me several routine and predictable questions, although a few of those clinicians never asked anything at all. Then the actual examination would begin. Some were more thorough than others; but in the end, medication was administered in every case.

When I reacted adversely to the initial prescriptions—which happened frequently—or when my symptoms would gradually worsen after taking them for several days or more, then other pills would be dispensed; and when they also proved to be ineffective and often harmful, then the only remaining solution was for each doctor to insist that my mother purchase even more of those problematic drugs that never worked. This futile, costly, time-consuming, and debilitating process began when I was only four and continued for the rest of my childhood, throughout my entire adolescence, and even crept into the first, few years of early adulthood.

The endless travel to doctors, the inordinate amount of time being detained in waiting rooms, and the endless, inevitable disappointments after having each current physician insist that his particular treatment finally was going to make me better occupied an abnormally large portion of my earlier life. This futile routine could have continued for many more years. However, I finally began refusing to listen to those voices in my life who insisted that I just haven't found the right doctor yet. At that point, I personally chose to throw away all of my old medications and explored other forms of wellness and healing.

While still in the care of practitioners of conventional Western medicine, the ineffectiveness of their treatments actually seemed to frustrate a few who were currently tending to me. On a couple of these occasions, with an annoyed tone of voice and accompanied by arrogant remarks, two doctors actually declared to my mother that my condition was not physical, but psychological. I then was transported successively to the offices of a physician-recommended psychologist and two psychiatrists, none of whom were able to relieve my symptoms either. However, the kindest and most insightful in that group urged my mother to take me to a different medical specialist instead of continuing therapy sessions with him.

The mechanical and unsurprising treatment approach of being handed drug after drug certainly was not scientific; and after years of watching my condition continue to deteriorate, my mother often referred to such ineffective procedures as nothing more than trial and error—which they certainly were. She would add that there was nothing logical about how they were treating me, even though during that period of my life we were all conditioned to respect and accept unconditionally the directives issued from our physicians. After all, they were the *chosen few* who were supposed to know how best to keep us healthy.

Regardless, after years of maintaining this *dance* with doctors, I regularly could tell them beforehand what medications they were about to prescribe. After recounting to them the harmful reactions I had previously with such drugs, they simply would write another slip for another pill, often insisting that I definitely would get better now and have no side-effects. In every instance of starting up a new medication regime, I always seemed to improve for a few days, unless there was an immediate allergic reaction. But shortly after the initial improvements, my condition regularly would flare up again; and oftentimes, it actually worsened considerably as long as I remained on those particular drugs.

Over the years, I have spoken to countless people who had similar results with their treatment plans, even when their symptoms weren't as serious as mine. So I realized that this phenomenon of having the medication appear to work for a short period and then discontinue demonstrating positive results wasn't as singular to my case as I first imagined. In actuality, it seems as though the placebo effect occurs with actual medications as much as it does with any intended placebo, with only one significant difference. When the initial improvement wanes, the actual placebos don't exhibit any harmful and toxic side effects as the drugs readily do.

Nowadays, I have heard numerous medical professionals speak of every possible cure (other than medications

Despite the negative spin that corporate medicine has put on the effectiveness of placebos as a valid medical treatment (and, perhaps, because of such inaccurate and unscientifically devised propaganda), Herbert Benson MD[7] has spent decades researching the validity of healing patients using placebos as a valid remedy for numerous diseases. Many of his findings have been so compelling that he chose to replace the term *placebo* with the more appropriate phrase: *remembered wellness*.

In his book *Timeless Healing: The Power and Biology of Belief*, Dr. Benson discusses how *remembered wellness*, and similar processes, have been used in medicine for centuries:

> Learned in childhood, the act of pleasing others often has its own rewards, including health benefits, as is suggested by the word "placebo," from a Latin root meaning "I shall be pleasing or acceptable." Most health professionals and patients are eager to please one another, the former by being friendly, hopeful, and confident in the therapies being recommended, and the latter by getting better, by reporting improvements in health, or

---

prescribed by them and manufactured by pharmaceutical companies) as nothing more than placebos. Therefore, if a drug is even mildly successful it has often been referred to audaciously as a cure, but if anything else actually works, it simply is due to the *placebo effect*.

According to *Merriam-Webster*, the placebo effect is:

> …an improvement in the condition of a patient that occurs in response to treatment but cannot be considered due to the specific treatment used.

In other words, it has come to be accepted that the placebo has an ability to heal because of the mental belief (or thoughts) of patients that it will heal them. Consequently, the pharmaceutical industry and many medical professionals invalidate any form of healing practice other than that offered by drug-prescribing physicians and conveniently label all other healing options as being nothing more than placebos.

As I mentioned in the beginning of this footnote, I offer this anecdote to shed light on just another dualistic struggle that we continue to face on a daily basis concerning health issues. However, it only begins to touch on the possible political and financial dichotomies concerning the tactics that the pharmaceutical companies employ to invalidate all forms of possible cures other than the ones we must purchase from them. I am not suggesting that prescription medications never work nor that we should reject them in every case.

On the contrary, I cannot imagine having survived certain surgeries or critical treatments without the anesthesia, antibiotics, and the further drugs that were administered. However, in other instances, alternatives proved to be much more effective, despite the ongoing objections of corporate medicine and its eagerness to label everything not manufactured in its own laboratories as being untested, unscientific, and potentially dangerous. What about the plethora of simply the known dangers that every drug is required to list on the outside of its container?

However, does this mean that all those who practice chiropractic, acupuncture, naturopathy, homeopathy, herbology, and supplemental nutritional therapies are immune to this sort of duplicity? Of course not! Dualistic domains exist in everything. This includes all forms of healing, medicine, science, religion, the arts, and even in housekeeping and truck driving! At that time, the only difference that I found helpful in some of the alternative healing treatments was that drugs weren't handed to me. Moreover, I actually began to improve without any toxic side-effects or to have my financially-overburdened family spend any more money on additional psychiatric evaluations.

[7] According to *Wikipedia*:

> Herbert Benson (born 1935), is an American medical doctor, cardiologist, and founder of the Mind/Body Medical Institute at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) in Boston. He is a professor of mind/body medicine at Harvard Medical School and director emeritus of the Benson-Henry Institute (BHI) at MGH. He is a founding trustee of The American Institute of Stress. He has contributed more than 190 scientific publications and 12 books. More than five million copies of his books have been printed in different languages.

by complying with instructions.

Throughout history, society has afforded healers a special deference and admiration. We undoubtedly do this because we so ardently need for them to work magic and produce miracles. But in modern times, we've removed the aura we used to associate with healing. We've come to expect only facts and figures from our doctors, not hocus-pocus, and lately we don't even count on their succor and reassurance, as did previous generations. We disapprove of the deference people paid to physicians years ago, and we try to eliminate the intimidation factor many patients feel when they talk to their doctors. But in the process we may have depreciated our expectations of healers—the same expectations Hippocrates, the father of Western medicine, knew were important to our healing when he said, "Some patients, though conscious that their condition is perilous, recover their health simply through their contentment with the goodness of the physician."

Too often today, the sacred trust that should be developed between doctor and patient has been replaced by a set of rushed interactions. The therapeutic rewards a good relationship engenders are lost in an age when patients are discouraged from visiting their doctors. Researchers conducted an investigation at Massachusetts General Hospital in 1964 that warned us all about the importance of this bond. They compared two matched groups of patients who were to undergo similar operations. The doctor responsible for their anesthesia visited both groups of patients but interacted with them quite differently. He made only cursory remarks to patients in one group but treated the other group with warm and sympathetic attention, sitting on the patients' beds, detailing the steps of the operation, and telling them about the pain they might expect afterward.

The patients went on to have their operations and to recover. They were allowed to have as much pain relief medication as they requested. The hospital personnel caring for them either did not know to which group the patients belonged or were unaware that the test was being conducted.

The relationship established by the anesthesiologist made a tremendous impact. The patients who received the friendlier, more supportive visits got better faster and were discharged from the hospital an average of 2.7 days before patients in the other group.

> (This was, by the way, in the days before insurers determined the length of hospital stays.) And the patients treated in a warm and sympathetic manner experienced less pain, asking for half as much pain-alleviating medicine as the other group….

If we choose to discount or discredit the effectiveness and efficacy of placebos (or to use Dr. Benson's more apt term *remembered wellness*) we simply are creating another batch of dichotomies with which we must struggle. If the argument for not using techniques of remembered wellness is because it is based on the power of thought and belief, then conventional drugs and cures must also be held suspect. In any case, as we are all products of the mind garden, physical medication is just as much a manifestation of thought and belief as any other form of treatment.[8]

Aside from everything mentioned above, it is essential to recognize the many disguises of duality that can also be spotted in any further aspects of what we regularly have been taught to believe as the entirety of physical reality. For over two millennia, atoms have been considered to be the building blocks of the material universe. Democritus[9] first hypothesized their existence in the fifth century BCE. Yet, during the past several decades unbelievably tinier and more basic forms and units have been found.

A specifically stationery material universe once was accepted as being the extent of all that is. Now, it instead is considered to be an ever-expanding space in ever-accelerating time and possibly could be only one of an infinite number of parallel universes. Theoretically, different versions of ourselves and our current lifetimes exist in an endless variety of alternate realities.

Where there used to be a realization of only three dimensions, there now have been shown mathematically to be well over a dozen. Recently, we often have heard astronomers speak emphatically about having discovered distant planets that actually could sustain life as we know it. But just a few decades ago, astrophysicists who even dared to whisper anything suggesting the remotest possibility of extraterrestrial beings would often jeopardize their careers by doing so.

We continually invent new devises and methods to stretch out further and further into space or to identify increasingly miniscule components of all physical formations, but are there

[8] Although I mention here the importance for us to recognize the power of placebos in healing, this isn't meant to downplay the obvious significance and effectiveness of many modern-day drugs and vaccines. Without them, many of us may not still be alive today.

[9] Ancient Greek philosopher who lived roughly between 460 and 370 BCE.

truly any ultimate boundaries to be found in either direction? Some astronomers perpetually search for the decisively largest and/or furthest spatial structures in existence while there are physicists and other researchers pursuing micromorphological studies that delve into the exceedingly (and inconceivably) minute.

Despite these ongoing investigations, does an actual greatest or smallest material quantity really exist, or is our cosmic seesaw simply manufacturing further pretense to mask endless, new forms of thought-generated weeds of duality? Perhaps, these are part of none other than the perversely elegant workings of Eden's illicit tree. In more pragmatic terms, we should consider that the Tree of Good and Evil and the cosmic seesaw are nothing more than metaphoric images of illimitable, dualistic thought and all of its actualizations, manifesting as every aspect of existence and *non-existence*.

The more we think dualistically, the more we create corresponding embodiments of perennially separating, conflicting, competing, escalating, increasingly complex, ever-differentiating, and imperceptibly complicating realities upon which to act. Whenever our thoughts produce a larger materialization in one respect, then an opposite most assuredly will appear. Furthermore, if we expand the boundaries to find an ultimate in any direction, then new ultimates eventually must manifest to take their places.

This is obliged to happen not only in each path that we do explore but in every alternate direction as well—even when the idea of such *new ultimates* could be seen ironically as nothing other than an oxymoron. Dichotomous delineations are only limited by what restraining or obstructing thoughts we are able to cultivate dualistically at the moment.

IV.

An omnipresent weediness as our current state of affairs...

As we continue to live our lives within the weeds of duality (***as*** the weeds of duality),

how can we truly expect there ever to be a bona fide peace throughout the world? Or for that matter, do we actually think that a truly egalitarian civilization will emerge and end all poverty, hunger, violence, prejudice, and greed once and for all?

Our excessively materialistic, well-indoctrinated, highly manipulated, and societal habits have currently converted nearly every aspect of our lives into the quintessential shopping mall. Many of us have become an interminable bazaar comprised of something always readily buyable and sellable. We play these dualistic purchasing and vending games on Internet sites such as E-Bay and Craig's List. These capitalistic *derbies* also manifest as yard sales, garage sales, flea markets, farmers' markets, baked good sales, lemonade stands, and even peddling wrist watches, jewelry, contraband guns, and illicit drugs from the back seat of the family minivan.

Aside from endless professional offerings for lease or hire in classified ads, every personal item or service imaginable are also listed. We can buy or sell real estate, gold, invest in a wide variety of Ponzi and pyramid schemes, or squander hard-earned cash in dubious get-rich-quick courses and clubs. And on the Dark Web,[10] anyone can barter, snap up, or unload pretty much anything illegitimate or iniquitous that we could imagine. If we have enough cash and the right connections, we might conceivably purchase even a small nuke, a stolen submarine, or imported slaves from nearly every region on earth.

With these things in mind, do we honestly think amid this consumer-driven madness that the major governments of our fair planet (spending billions or trillions of dollars annually on new and more advanced weaponry) will simply retire their used or outdated guns and rockets? We would be naïve indeed to believe that they simply are thrown into dumpsters, taken away to landfills, and ultimately abandoned and forgotten. Do many of us actually consider what happens to the older weapons when they are being replaced?

How can we believe in a universal peace when there is an ever-increasing market for weapons worldwide? Are we so gullible to think that arms manufacturers, like any other business, when threatened with a diminishing number of buyers (as would be likely if all wars ended and a lasting peace suddenly became a viable reality) simply are going to stop production of their guns and missiles and bombs and tanks? Not only will they search for alternative marketplaces so their manufacturing plants can keep cranking out their deadly products, but—as is already done now—they most definitely will find ways to promote, justify, recycle, and resell the outdated weaponry over and over as many times as possible.

[10] For lack of a better term, we could think of portions of the Dark Web as an Internet underworld.

During the first few minutes of the highly acclaimed film *Lord of War*,[11] a brief scene opens on a battle-scarred, smoldering urban landscape with actor Nicolas Cage facing away from the camera. The ground is literally paved with layer upon layer of thousands of empty bullet casings scattered thickly in every direction.

He is dressed in an elegant suit and has a high-priced briefcase in hand while playing the role of a second-generation Russian American from Brooklyn, New York. As a young adult, he discovered within himself a strong aptitude and an insatiable appetite for selling weapons. After experiencing the success of his first few sales, he decided that peddling his wares on the street simply wasn't lucrative enough to satiate his increasingly expensive tastes.

Consequently, he began searching for avenues to make his business more lucrative and soon rose to the top of the international gunrunning trade. He became so successful and so influential that one of his bloodthirsty, despotic, real-life clients declared to him:

> You know, they call me the Lord of War, but perhaps it is you.

In the first scene, Cage is dressed as the dapper, exemplary arms dealer. After looking out over the shattered buildings in the background where several ominous, blackened plumes of smoke are gushing into the air, he slowly turns towards the audience with a slightly twisted smile on his face and begins to voice these disturbingly sobering facts—nonetheless, a definite consideration for any *good* businessman in this line of work:

> There are 550 million firearms in worldwide circulation. That's one firearm for every twelve people on the planet. The only question is… how do we arm the other eleven?

And just before the final scene fades to credits, an on-screen text states the following:

> This film is based on actual events. While private gunrunners continue to thrive, the world's biggest arms suppliers are the U.S., U.K., Russia, France and China. They are also the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council.

It is quite an irony to think that the Security Council of the United Nations, the select group of nations especially responsible for maintaining peace across the planet, also provide a lion's share of weapons to dictatorial regimes that constantly start new wars, violate human

[11] This 2005 film was written and directed by Andrew Niccol. The cast included Nicolas Cage, Ethan Hawke, Jared Leto, Bridget Moynahan, Donald Sutherland, and Ian Holm.

rights, and are often guilty of genocide as well; and when it is inconvenient or embarrassing for those Security Council members to be seen dealing in the most controversial situations, they simply hire independent gunrunners such as Nicolas Cage's character to do their dirty work for them. How can war end and peace prevail when a marketplace thriving on blood continues to prosper? Sadly, this internationally supported enterprise has fully entrenched itself in our free-market economy and has no intention of disappearing or even diminishing in the slightest.

But then there are also the many illicit, dualistic activities and violations of oil companies, banks, pharmaceuticals, international real estate businesses, fast foods, retail stores, the automotive industry, electronics, tobacco, the illegal drug trade, the art and antique trades, and the international film industry. This list actually can trickle down to include local hospitals, town halls, doctors, plumbers, electricians, and even the neighborhood firewood dealer.

After the disaster of 9/11 in New York City (briefly following the arduous and painful death of my mother on September 1st and my forty-ninth birthday on September 7th), I wrote a poem reflecting on the countless ironies and duplicities of that fateful day and sent it to friends and colleagues living on four continents. Approximately one year later, I expanded this piece also to include an introduction written in prose, but for the sake of continuity it will be omitted here. The poem alone was entitled "Timeless Journey from 9/11".

Although my intention was to include accurately the information and observations that I retrieved from radio broadcasts, television coverage and interviews, articles from periodicals and newspapers, and from two separate books, it certainly could cause disagreements with individuals who have different political leanings and from the uninformed as well. But this only reflects more of the same, endless struggles we experience upon our treacherous seesaw of duality:

O that September day,
That ill-fated eleventh,
That unforgettable day reflecting endless ironies of existence—
Flooded with vibrant life, blue skies, and sudden death—
That Biblical day when the Twin Towers of Babel
    collapsed in horrific heaps to earth
Leaving vastness of rubble, emptiness, and despair
In the heart of lower Manhattan,

And in the heart of American people—

An American people manipulated expertly and exquisitely
By a never-ending program of ever-static media
and ever-changing promises,
A great American people who rushed blindly and automatically
To 24-hour, seven-day-a-week, always-open markets,
Buying bumper-stickers as visual recitations
Of the perennial platitudes of politics and religion,
Also buying flags, millions and millions of flags—
Displaying them carelessly, ignorantly, irreverently,
Forgetting or never knowing, among other things,
The importance for the purposeful and constant illumination
of their sacred icons—
To never permit a single flag to be touched by darkness
of night or evil—

Oh that generous American people,
Sponsoring these new-found opportunities
For peddlers of clichés, flags, and nationalism—
This gullible American people
Naïvely nodding to the demands of Washington hawks
(or poorly disguised vultures),
To those birds of prey who swarm hungrily over the pre-planned chaos
of the capital
And who quietly yet avariciously, using wealth of the people,
Fund contracts to arms–merchant buddies and weapons designers—
Inciting war, while sacrilegiously making presidential promises
of peace from the pulpit,
By televising to millions the pounding rhythms
of Marine Corp drummers
Echoing inappropriately through sanctified halls of the National Cathedral,

Accompanying an influential and emotional congregation
Singing, as though chanting, the stirring words
to "The Battle Hymn of the Republic",
Words so reminiscent of self-righteous battle cries of Napoleonic priests
Enflaming the blood of innocent peasants,
Provoking a call to arms cried out in name of God and country
With the underlying intention of joining church and state…

Oh this September day,
A day heralding the eve of Armageddon perhaps,
We must stand to change directions—
To consciously alter the avaricious intentions of leaders
Who used isolated incidents of death by anthrax
to instill fear and terror
Into the hearts of a deceived and manipulated public—
So conveniently orchestrated just a few timeless days
after the towers of power collapsed,
To commence with agendas of aggression for profits
too long suppressed by former doves
And engage stealth bombers for the colonization of virgin oil property in the guise of
liberty.

Oh beware the keepers of our fate.
For blindly we walk onto the set of a theatrical play plotted long ago
And open the curtains to the first act of doom.
We must consciously alter the ill-fated direction of all leaders now,
Refuse in our hearts and minds to go blindly forward
like bugs into the fire,
To steer the unconscious waves of greed and fear into balance,
To undo the prophetic powers of Nostradamus' quatrains,[12]

[12] Michel de Nostredame (1503–1566) was a French physician and renowned seer also known as Nostradamus. According

And plant completed thoughts of healing into all hearts now.

It is true that many of the people who read this poem might nod wholeheartedly and affirm that its overall message resonates with their own beliefs. Yet, there undeniably will be others who strongly disagree. After all, politics is one of those human enterprises that has bred and fed a divisive, dualistic condition in every corner of the world since the dawning of civilization.

There are definitely humane leaders and legislators even when their political ideology fundamentally opposes other counterparts who also tend to be more or less altruistic in their principles and practices. Nonetheless, there are additional dichotomous counterforces who are adversarial, corrupt, self-serving racketeers with the primary motive of obtaining perpetual publicity, power, and wealth.

No matter what our opinions are about any political or governmental ideologies and personalities of the past and present, it is important to review as many facts about them as we can. News reports, journalistic reviews, critiques, videotaped speeches, interviews, press conferences, and written documents substantiating facts are all a vital part of the public record, and it is crucial to appraise political promises (and deviations from those promises), achievements, claims, facts substantiating or negating claims, and every other inconsistency and misrepresentation that is well-documented.

In order to maintain a rational perspective regarding our own beliefs concerning any partisan figure or the ever-evolving face of each accompanying ideology, it is essential not to

---

to Wikipedia:

> ...[He] is best known for his book *Les Prophéties*, a collection of 942 poetic quatrains allegedly predicting future events. The book was first published in 1555 and has rarely been out of print since his death.
>
> ...In the years since the publication of his Les Prophéties, Nostradamus has attracted many supporters, who, along with much of the popular press, credit him with having accurately predicted many major world events. Most academic sources reject the notion that Nostradamus had any prophetic abilities and maintain that the associations made between world events and Nostradamus's quatrains are the result of misinterpretations or mistranslations (sometimes deliberate). These academics argue that Nostradamus's predictions are characteristically vague, meaning they could be applied to virtually anything, and are useless for determining whether their author had any real prophetic powers. They also point out that English translations of his quatrains are almost always of extremely poor quality, based on later manuscripts, produced by authors with little knowledge of sixteenth-century French, and often deliberately mistranslated to make the prophesies fit whatever events the translator believed they were supposed to have predicted.

My reason for mentioning Nostradamus's prophecy in the above lines was not because of any personal belief in those who have interpreted his quatrains to have predicted the 9/11 catastrophe at the World Trade Center *Twin Towers* in 2001. On the contrary, my intention was solely to use the ominous imagery portrayed within Nostradamus's alleged prediction as simply another dark, dualistic rumbling that was part of the backdrop surrounding this horrendously diabolical disaster.

get hooked on simply a single media resource or political organization and artlessly accept whatever agenda they happen to be selling at the time—no matter how convincing it sounds or how much we want to believe that it's true. Also, whenever news suppliers claim highly unfavorable things about any political figure's activities, promises, and activities with whom they obviously disagree, the best thing for us to do in response is to find recordings or video footage of statements made by those personalities in question and discover whether or not that figure is being truthful or the opposing newscasters are actually lying and attempting to manipulate and indoctrinate the public with seemingly unending streams of deceptive and false narratives.[13]

Ostensibly, none of us can fully escape the countless dualities that any foreign or domestic company or corporation, federal or local government (or countless other organizations) might beset upon the world—aside from those that nearly every individual on earth routinely produce and proliferate as well. And it seems as though any and all dualistic extremes are ever-widening and becoming more and more drastic. For me, this seems especially apparent since the twin towers crumbled to dust more than twenty years ago.

Examples of such broad-based, built-in, weed-engineering seesawing mechanisms almost certainly include:

1. *Economic, military, and political dominance (causing a widespread increase in unrest and rebellion).*
2. *Free trade versus monopolization.*
3. *Legitimacy countering corruption.*

---

[13] In his satirical novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, humorist Mark Twain wrote about a fanciful tale told to him by an alleged acquaintance—most likely, one of Twain's literary alter egos. This peculiar confrère recounted of how he was supposedly thrust back in time to Medieval England during the 6th century. He soon came to realize that the local people-of-the-day who crossed his path were exceedingly gullible. They believed absolutely anything that their leaders (in other words, their societally designated "betters") might tell them.

But at the same time, this intriguing story-teller seemed to be warning all of us today to think for ourselves and base our beliefs on well-researched facts rather than on rumors, unfounded opinion, or political spin—no matter how impressive or important those people (or information sources) seem to be, for they might be either purporting actual facts to us or instead twisting them into self-serving rants of deception, manipulation, and fantasy-driven disinformation:

> …it occurred to me, all of a sudden, that these *animals* didn't reason, that they never put this and that together, that all their talk showed that they didn't know a discrepancy when they saw it. [transcribed from a LibriVox audiobook]

According to *Wikipedia*:

> Samuel Langhorne Clemens (November 30, 1885–April 21, 1910), known by his pen name Mark Twain, was an American writer, humorist, entrepreneur, publisher, and lecturer. He was lauded as the "greatest humorist the United States has produced," and William Faulkner called him "the father of American literature."

4. *Climate stability threatened by environmental disaster.*
5. *Global pandemics and the ideological (and political) battles between those who would take preventative measures against catching and spreading disease and those who would not.*
6. *A powerful, profiteering elite controlling the subservient masses.*
7. *Free society undermined by despots and demagogues.*

And the list goes on ad infinitum…

It also includes more personal, individualized sets of dichotomies. For example, there is the honest and upright neighbor in contrast to others who lie, cheat, and steal even while dealing with their closest friends. Additionally, there are the helpful and hurtful siblings, the giving and selfish spouses, or the promising, talented, and popular cousins opposed to the *black-sheep* and *losers* of any family at large.

As was just mentioned, no one can seemingly avoid this infinite array of dualistic weeds—at least, not until we acknowledge a more enlightened possibility for all that exists. Once we truly become mindful of how to rid ourselves of this current, seemingly futile state of affairs, then it is essential for the preservation of humanity to refrain from shirking our duties as conscious gardeners.

Essentially, I believe we are all called to weed away every implementation of dualistic thought, belief, and practice (all those things repeatedly separating us from actual love); and in their place, it is vital for us to plant tirelessly the seeds of unending, unwavering, and unconditional compassion—even when those things seem so distant and even nonexistent in our reality.

V.

Ensnared in semantic silliness: who's right, who's wrong, and whose finger is pointing at the moon...

The American comedian Emo Philips has caricaturized an extreme to which some religious zealots will go as they judge that their beliefs are right and everyone else's convictions are not. His simple satire reflects the absurdly drastic measures that any fanatic might take (religious or otherwise) while he epitomizes such a condition in this brief, comedic skit:

> Once I saw this guy on a bridge about to jump. I said, "Don't do it!" He said, "Nobody loves me." I said, "God loves you. Do you believe in God?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Are you a Christian or a Jew?" He said, "A Christian." I said, "Me, too! Protestant or Catholic?" He said, "Protestant." I said, "Me, too! What franchise?" He said, "Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?" He said, "Northern Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region, or Northern Conservative Baptist Eastern Region?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region." I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1879, or Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912." I said, "Die, heretic!" And I pushed him over.

Although some might be convinced that this anecdote highly exaggerates the religious attitudes in American Protestantism and is only poking fun of small fanatical factions. However, Phillips' portrayal is closer to the mark and more widespread than many people would ever want to believe. Such displays of extreme *I'm-right-you're-wrong* attitudes and behaviors have repeated themselves continuously from the early colonies at Plymouth and Jamestown, and even in today's world. We pride ourselves in the fact that the US Constitution provides religious freedom for all, but this key document governing the American people never seemed to stop

citizens from persecuting and even murdering people whose religious beliefs don't coincide precisely with their own.

During the nineteenth century, religious oppression in the United States became so severe that hundreds of thousands of citizens fled westward across the prairies to escape all sorts of tyrannical *piety*. Such toxic overzealousness never was instigated by government, but persistently by self-righteous and fanatical family members, friends, neighbors, passers-by, and even entire church, village, and regional communities. The insidiously pervasive and ironically *Christian* hatred circulating then was so severe that Emo Philips' satirical piece shouldn't appear exaggerated in the least.

Another religious example of the *I'm-right-you're-wrong* duality often is reflected in how supposedly devout people often abuse the conscious gardener's essential *tool of prayer*—a specific implement or set of techniques described earlier in the book. Instead of filling their hearts with objectives of divine love while they pray, oftentimes they use prayer with the intention to judge, dominate, diminish, or destroy their dualistic rivals and opponents while those rivals and opponents simultaneously are praying against them ostensibly to the same *God* with similar, self-righteous motivations and pleas.

This certainly was an epidemic misuse of prayer not only by Christians, but by any number of other religious groups throughout history. They were all ensnared in the weediness of that duality-inciting *I'm-right-you're-wrong* mentality. Countless individuals and groups practicing such beliefs perceive themselves as being the good ones, the right ones, and the only ones deserving enough to have their prayers answered and fulfilled.

An amusingly mocking portrayal of this brand of hypocrisy was written into an episode of the acclaimed television comedy series *Third Rock from the Sun*.[14] The story is about a group of aliens who land on earth to study the indigenous human population here. They disguise themselves as a seemingly typical American suburbanite family. The extraterrestrial *information officer* poses as the young, teenage son attending high school. In the midst of his studies there, he is ordered by the alien *high commander*—who masquerades as his father—to join the school basketball team. By doing this, he expects it to benefit his research on human adolescent activities.

Just before the first game begins, his coach requests all of the team members to kneel

[14] For five seasons beginning in 1996, *Third Rock from the Sun* was acclaimed as being the most hilarious, well-written comedy on TV. It starred John Lithgow, Kristen Johnston, French Stewart, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, and Jane Curtin.

and pray to God for a victory. As Tommy Solomon (the alien) is participating in this ritual, he begins to question the coach on the apparent contradictions that he is detecting, especially since the rival team is also praying at the same time:

Coach: Dear Lord, if it be within your great wisdom and mercy, please grant us the strength and courage to beat the h**l out of the Central High Muskrats. And if you're not…

Tommy: Excuse me, coach.

Coach: We're in the middle of a prayer, Solomon.

Tommy: Yeah, but do you think we should be bothering God over a basketball game?

Coach: Well, this is important!

Tommy: But the other team is praying too. Oh, so our God is stronger than their God?

Coach: There's only one God, Solomon.

Tommy: Ah… Well, am I the only one seeing a conflict of interest here?

In the following two extracts from Rinker Buck's bestselling account *The Oregon Trail: A New American Journey*, the author emphasizes not only the divisive incongruities infesting nineteenth-century Christianity but comments on how similar dualistic contradictions infected other essential rudiments of our well-cherished democratic society as well:

> History almost everywhere is tragic and ironic, but in America the contrasts are more stark because we set such high ideals. Fortified by stirring Enlightenment appeals to the rights of man, we fought a war of liberation from the British crown and then decided to constitutionally protect the enslavement of our African laborers. The great evangelical pulsation of the 1820s spread religion and inspired useful social reform, while also unleashing decades of denominational squabbling, even murder, in the name of Christianity. We fought the Civil War over slavery that cost more than 600,000 deaths but still sugarcoat what happened by describing it as an unresolved conflict over "states'

> rights." I try not to even think any more about the serial idiocy of leadership during my own lifetime, when sixty thousand American lives were squandered in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq.
>
> …Americans were those folks who loved to profess peace-loving values, but who fought about everything. Allegedly America was founded in part to promote religious freedom and harmony, but in fact we were a cauldron of denominational spats, prejudice, and even homicidal church wars. This created a lot of conflict, and for millions of Americans, the solution for problems where they were was to quickly sell out, pack their belongings, and move somewhere else, preferably west….

Although the preceding descriptions included a grim portrayal of the duplicity existing between the *Love-of-Christ* ideology and the actual words and deeds of both Christian leaders and followers alike, these are by no means isolated cases. During the past recent decades, semantical bickering between ultra conservative evangelical groups has increased exponentially. Some even openly support the establishment of an autocratic theocracy to replace a government founded on democratic rights for all.

Instead of advocating the love of Christ for all peoples, increasingly more factions insist that God's love is reserved exclusively for those who believe exactly as they do. With an increasing degree of fanaticism, some of them actually do appear to resemble Emo Phillips' nit-picking, judgmental character willing to push anyone off the bridge who doesn't believe in precisely the same manner that he does.

As so many of them are now staunch and fanatical supporters of gun groups (including corporate lobbyists), the more militant factions seem like an emerging militia for the religious right—ironically evolving into what could be appropriately coined as American-styled *Jihadists for Jesus*. One of many antithetical slogans on bumper stickers and T-shirts alike tend to regurgitate some of their antithetical, conflicting sentiments that definitely cannot echo the voice of a universally compassionate Lord:

> God, guts, and guns are what made America great.

That being said, throughout the annals of Christian history worldwide, the self-righteous, I'm-right-you're-wrong mentality has existed since the inception of the religion—twisting and conveniently arranging a multitude of loveless prejudices in a multitude of ways—to suit various

non-spiritual, often political, and regularly monetary objectives-of-the-moment.

Consider how some current rightwing Christian groups often blame the entire religion of Islam for the terrorist acts of tiny, fanatical sects (regularly motivated by power, prejudice, profit, and extreme politics rather than purely spiritual beliefs). Yet, the horrible atrocities committed against thousands of innocent Muslim men, women, and children by Christian Crusaders are conveniently forgotten or ignored. Despite that there was killing and ravaging on both sides, the two hundred years of violent campaigns to conquer and reconquer the Holy Land included endless torturing, pillaging, plundering, raping, and possible genocide perpetrated in the name of Christ's love. Apparently, the occupying of this so-called sacred real estate was more of a priority to those who held such pseudo-Christian convictions than not savagely slaughtering countless innocents who just so happened to be born on the opposite end of that *I'm-right-you're-wrong* seesaw.

It is true certain popes didn't condone all of these barbaric escapades. In various cases, they actually excommunicated some of the crusaders. But such limited actions could never rectify—in contrast—centuries of murderous aggression.

Throughout various parts of Europe not under the direct or total control of the pope, another brutal arm of Christianity was often implemented. The Vatican Army forced the will of the papacy upon nonbelievers by subjugating *pagan* nations (and then forcefully converting them to Catholicism) and also bringing rival Christian factions back under the control of the Roman Church.

During the numerous inquisitions sponsored by the Church itself, we cannot even fathom how many innocent believers were falsely condemned, tortured, and murdered. This was done with a vindictive and ruthless zeal—complacently proclaiming these inexcusable evils as being the will of their compassionate and merciful Lord.

Likewise, during the past two or three centuries, more neoteric brands of self-proclaimed *inquisitors* have arisen among the so-called faithful. In the twentieth century during World War II, all of the German Christian churches (including Catholicism, Lutheranism, and other Protestant sects) supported the Nazis—justifying the roundups, imprisonment, and eventual extermination of much of the Jewish population. This occurred within not only the boundaries of the Aryan homeland but in all of its occupied territories as well.

Today, especially in America, a new breed of macho, prejudiced, gun-toting, fear-mongering Jesus followers antagonize, threaten, and even openly harm anyone who doesn't

look and act as they do. Although their behavior and beliefs aren't remotely aligned with the universal love, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness that Christ required of all his followers, they nonetheless cling blindly to a few inflammatory scriptural verses from the Old Testament (laced with the nefarious propaganda of pushy preachers and greedy politicians) that superficially seem to support their hatefulness and fear while completely ignoring the main principal of their alleged faith. They instead should be directing all of their convictions and actions within the framework of true Christian ethics—and that ultimate framework is none other than divine love of course.

Once again, let us return to past centuries where there were several years when the church's Ecumenical Councils were often forums for verbal *bloodbaths* to ensue. Even decisions to include or exclude certain sacred texts into Holy Scripture and church doctrines (frequently and heatedly disputed) oftentimes were indoctrinated for no other reason than personal recognition, political gain, and ascending through the competitive ranks of church hierarchy.

But these sorts of duplicity are not exclusive to Christianity alone. In Islam, there has always been serious infighting within the religion's branches and sects, not to mention the centuries-old disputes between the individual branches themselves. The same can be said for nearly all religions in every corner of the world. Moreover, many followers can become so enthralled by their own interpretations of scriptural writings and historical accounts—while occasionally being caught between politics and personal ambitions as well—that they are inclined to condemn all other beliefs as being invalid or simply out-and-out wrong.

A wonderful ancient Buddhist story can be used to illustrate parts of these dualistic conditions. Although it has no particular title, it is usually referred to as *finger pointing at the moon*:

> ...It is like when someone points his finger at the moon to show it to someone else. Guided by the finger, that person should see the moon. If he looks at the finger instead and mistakes it for the moon, he loses not only the moon but the finger also.[15]

This not only occurs within every religious faction on the planet but it can happen when each of us individually differs in our personally tailored opinions about God, divine love, or anything else to such an extent that we can only see our own points of view (or our own *pointing finger*),

[15] This saying comes from a passage in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, which had a large influence on Chinese Buddhism (Chan) before finding its way to Japan where it became Zen.

thereby totally missing, negating, or even destroying divinity itself and every other cherished objective of our beliefs or desires—even as each of them is continually perceived to be that beloved (though elusive) *moon*.

From the perspective of a Christian monk and mystic in the Middle Ages, Meister Eckhart spoke of it like this:

> Whoever seeks God in a special [specific] way gets the way and misses God who lies hidden in it.[16]

We can become so obsessed with being affiliated with the right religion, the one respectable church, the appropriate sect, the only legitimate belief, the proper interpretation of scripture, the good prayers, the perfect meditation group, the ideal spiritual guru, or the one true God that there is no truth actually perceived because we are completely blinded by the illusory distractions conjured up by our own *pointing finger*.

This fixation breeds self-righteousness and excessive zeal. It also tends to pronounce all other perceptions and beliefs as false ones and any divergent perspectives as being wrong (or at least inferior). Consequently, divine love simply vanishes from our words and actions and ultimately from the world. Confounding dualities instigated by the pointing finger alone can overrun every aspect of existence with their perpetually weed-ridden judgements, separations, and dichotomous delineations.

After all, finger pointing is just another mechanism functioning within and reinforcing that entangling, illusory veil of *Maya*. Even in our own lives, *finger pointing at the moon* continues to be a pervasive, epidemic malady seeding endless dualities worldwide.

When *this* family member or *that* friend is trying to convince us into joining one religion or another because it is the *only way*, or if strangers, acquaintances, teachers, political leaders, or anyone else wants us to blindly accept and follow their opinions, advice, actions, and subsequent mandates for similar reasons, it instead would be prudent to heed the ageless wisdom of Gautama Buddha that has been handed down to us from nearly two-and-a-half thousand years ago:

> …don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by

[16] This is quoted from Christopher Matcolm Knauf's Internet essay: "Meister Eckhart and the Wayless Way".

> inference, by agreement through pondering views, by probability… When you know for yourselves that, "These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the wise; these qualities, when adopted and carried out, lead to welfare [well-being] and to happiness"—then you should enter and remain in them.[17]

In other words, when others expect us to follow their beliefs unconditionally (with blind faith), they often do this because they insist that they are right and everyone else is wrong. However, if they do this out of fanatical zeal, pomposity, arrogance, or self-righteousness—or simply because a family member or friend of theirs insisted to them that it be true—instead of wanting sincerely to guide us into divine love, then they are ensnaring us with just another illusory implementation of *finger pointing*.

Perhaps the most pertinent reference to the finger-pointing-at-the-moon analogy originated around 800 AD. When Bodhidharma[18] arrived in China, he discovered that the majority of Chinese followers didn't understand the true nature of Buddhism at all. They fixated on the interpretations of texts and considered the ever-changing physical manifestations surrounding them to be reality.

He wished to convey to these people that when we are caught in the illusion of obsessing on our finger pointing at the moon, we lose not only our true objective by mistaking our finger for the moon, but we also need to understand why the moon isn't our purpose or goal either. The verity of the moon solely exists within the mind, not in holy texts, nor anywhere in the world around us.

In other words, the actual *moon* **exists** in the *divine within* where the verity of all existence dwells as an all-encompassing, incorruptible love. Any other *moons* for which we might search can never be found from, within, or through our well-practiced individual, familial, or ancestral beliefs. Nor can they ever be discovered by clinging to personal preferences for one cultural, religious, or philosophical doctrine over another.

However, once we have immersed ourselves within genuine oneness, we will begin not

---

[17] From the Kalama Sutta, Buddha is speaking to the Kalamas. This particular translation from the Pali is by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

[18] According to *Wikipedia*:

> Bodhidharma was a Buddhist monk who lived during the 5th or 6th century. He is traditionally credited as the transmitter of Chan Buddhism to China, and regarded as its first Chinese patriarch. According to Chinese legend, he also began the physical training of the monks of Shaolin Monastery that led to the creation of Shaolin kungfu [kung fu]. In Japan, he is known as Daruma.

only to understand the nature of the *moon* to which our finger is pointing, but our own nature as being a totally indispensable part of this sublime unity. This is what such a moon signifies and actually represents.

In Krista Tippett's 2016 conversation with the Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (later included in her book *Becoming Wise: An Inquiry into the Mystery and Art of Living*), he spoke to her of the undeniable unity residing within us all: [19]

> …The extraordinary thing we now know, thanks to Crick and Watson's discovery of DNA and the decoding of the human and other genomes, is that all life—everything, all the three million species of life and plant life—all have the same source. We all come from a single source. Everything that lives has its genetic code written in the same alphabet. Unity creates diversity. So don't think of one God, one truth, one way. Think of one God creating this extraordinary number of ways, the 6,800 languages that are actually spoken. Don't think there's only one language within which we can speak to God.
>
> The Bible is saying to us the whole time: Don't think that God's as simple as you are. He's in places you would never expect him to be. And you know, we lose a bit of that in English translation. When Moses at the burning bush says to God, "Who are you?" God says to him three words: "Hayah asher hayah." Those words are mistranslated in English as "I am that which I am." But in Hebrew, it means "I will be who or how or where I will be." Meaning, Don't think you can predict me. I am a God who is going to surprise you. One of the ways God surprises us is by letting a Jew or a Christian discover the trace of God's presence in a Buddhist monk or a Sikh tradition of hospitality or the graciousness of Hindu life. Don't think we can confine God into our categories. God is bigger than religion.

However, whenever we fail to remember that God isn't only bigger than religion but is beyond all such comparisons, it would be well to remind ourselves how every spiritual belief we embrace or condemn (by pronouncing each one as being either right or wrong) is instead an integral part of the unifying presence of divine love—which is God indeed. The aforementioned *Baptist satire* devised by Emo Philips shouts out to us emphatically what can happen when we practice the dichotomous and isolating notion of always being right while we perceive everyone

[19] This interview with Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks took place on Oct. 29, 2016. At the time, he was teaching at NYU, Yeshiva University, and King's College in London. He also was the Chief Rabbi of the UK for twenty-two years until 2013.

else's beliefs as being wrong.

Such judgmental and unloving notion can only rip us away from this essential unity. We become so infatuated with our own *way* or *belief* as the *pointing finger* that divine love (for which we are so adamantly searching and professing as the metaphorical *moon*) is completely lost in our own egocentric and self-righteous zeal.

To illustrate a specific example of *finger pointing at the moon* using a modern-day backdrop to which many of us might relate more readily, I would like to paraphrase this quintessentially American parable. It is usually told as a brief anecdote, but I have chosen to elaborate considerably on the storyline for dramatic effect and to emphasize that there is also a serious moral to this otherwise witty and ironic tale:

> A devoutly religious man grew up in a typical Midwestern suburb. He attended church every Sunday and prayed diligently at least twice daily. After both of his parents had passed away, he chose to remain in the family home. Nearly a decade had gone by before he fell in love with a beautiful woman. Soon thereafter, they were married. Although the man's house was modest in size, the newlyweds decided not to sell it or move away. Both of them were perfectly content to remain where they were.
>
> They continued residing there happily for several years until his wife suddenly fell ill from a rare and terminal disease. Even though she died at home, the man chose to continue living in this house where he had been raised by his parents. Soon after he buried his beloved, he also decided that he would never remarry.
>
> For the next ten years, he continued leading a quiet, humble, and uneventful life. But as climate change began to affect adversely that region of the country, the weather conditions became increasingly more unpredictable while local storms seemed to be progressively larger, lengthier in duration, and much more severe.
>
> During one particularly wet and blustery spring, all of the local weather stations started issuing warnings for a rapidly approaching storm, one with hurricane-class gales and widespread flooding. As conditions seriously deteriorated outside of his suburban home, he began praying fervently to God for protection. After several days of torrential downpours and cyclonic winds, the violent weather caused considerable damage

statewide.

Subjected to nearly a week of torrential downpours, the course of a nearby river began to deviate as the swelling waterway rose out of its banks and flooded several adjoining counties. High-velocity winds persisted in howling ceaselessly while they tore down countless powerlines, causing a regional blackout. Now that all access to electricity from the grid was nonexistent, his TV, computer, and radio no longer worked. Consequently, he couldn't keep up-to-date with local weather reports.

One morning, just after waking from a particularly disturbing dream, he looked out of his bedroom window and spotted countless cars, trucks, picnic tables, and miscellaneous junk quickly floating by the house. Apparently, the flooding had risen and spread substantially over night. He also noticed that the other side of the street was still intact, and many of his neighbors were hurriedly loading their cars, getting themselves ready to evacuate the area.

He quickly rushed downstairs and went out onto his front porch. The young couple who lived directly across the street from him was just about ready to leave when the wife called out his name. She urged him to wade through the water while he still could. Her husband threw one end of a rope over to him so he could tie it around his waist while crossing the flooded side of the roadway. After that, they both insisted that he could come with them and evacuate to a safer location.

Indeed, he was truly grateful for their offer and thanked them profusely. But he nevertheless refused their assistance, insisting that it would be perfectly safe for him to remain behind. God surely would answer his prayers for help, so he stood there silently—watching the last of his neighbors drive away.

Just before nightfall, the water had risen up onto his porch and now was beginning to seep into the living room. He continued praying fervently for God to intervene, when he suddenly could hear the motor of a small boat approaching. It was a rescue team organized by the state police. The troopers in the boat implored him to get in quickly but he adamantly refused. "Don't worry about me. I'll be fine." He still was confident that God

was coming to save him.

At daybreak, early the following morning, he had just awoken in his upstairs bedroom when he noticed that there were several inches of water rising steadily all around him. He immediately leapt out of bed and made his way to the window. After drawing open the lower sash, he crawled out to a small ledge and climbed hurriedly onto the roof.

Within the next hour, floodwaters had risen over much of the roof's exterior so he was ultimately forced to straddle the peak while desperately clinging to the chimney top. Trying not to despair, he recited one of his favorite Psalms from the Old Testament to give him comfort. Just after ending the verse, a National Guard helicopter flew overhead. A small rope-ladder was tossed down to him and he could see two men beckoning to him to climb up quickly.

But instead of accepting their invitation, he refused to budge and signaled for them to leave. After several minutes, the ladder was retrieved and the copter flew off into the distance. Just before it vanished from sight, a massive swell rose high above the remaining rooftop and swept the man away to an untimely death.

However, in the twinkling of an eye, he found himself within the celestial realm. Everything was radiant and beautiful. A melodious voice began to sing and he knew instantly that it had to be the divine utterances of the Lord.

Unexpectedly, this voice began speaking directly to the man by asking him quietly, "My son, why are you here?" In disbelief the man replied, "Why am I here? I am here because you ignored my prayers and never kept your promise to save me. I am here because you failed to come to my aid when I implored you to do so. I always remained loyal to you. I kept your commandments. I prayed every day of my life. I did good works. So why is it that you had forsaken me in my greatest hour of need?"

"But I never forsook you and surely answered all of your prayers", God replied sadly. "First, I inspired your neighbors to offer their assistance. Then, I sent in a rescue boat; and finally, I brought you a helicopter. What else would you have had me do to keep you from such a demise?

"This untimely end is of your own choosing. Instead of accepting any of the support that I did summon to you, your inflexible notion of how divine intervention should appear has blinded you; and through this misconception, you have failed to recognize the most important, loving miracle of all: God is compassion in action through the good works of all living beings."

Before proceeding further with our discussion, I would like to include one more parable. It normally is told as a humorous story and oftentimes simply as a brief joke. But there is an important moralistic element expressed here, so in this current rendition of mine we might consider it to be a fable as well:

Many years ago there was a very kind and generous rabbi who lived in an impoverished urban neighborhood just outside of New York City. He helped his community tirelessly. Whenever the homeless shelter had no extra beds, he occasionally took vagrants off the street and offered them food and shelter in his own, tiny apartment.

If people could not get a job, he would encourage them assiduously and assist them until they were able to find work. He often gave food to penniless parents who were unable to provide enough sustenance for their young children. If there were older individuals who needed medical attention, his old and rickety VW minibus was still always available to drive them to their doctors' appointments and make unexpected trips to the hospital emergency room day or night.

His congregation absolutely adored him. Whenever he spoke to his followers, he tended to stir their souls and his words often moved them to tears. He had been rabbi at his temple for nearly five decades. Since he always had been blessed with good health and a keen mind, it never dawned on him that there might be a time when he should stop working; nor for that matter did it occur to anyone else either. The entire community depended on him for the selfless role he played in his service to everyone in the neighborhood.

However, on a bleak winter's night when he was walking home from a simple Shabbat dinner at the temple, it suddenly struck him that he soon would be visiting his eightieth birthday and didn't have nearly enough money for any sort of retirement. While entering

the foyer of his building, he unexpectedly heard the voice of his deceased mother speaking out in his mind. Despite that he was her cherished son and the well-loved rabbi for hundreds of loyal followers, she nevertheless kvetched to him about his being overly generous. Her scolding finger pointed crookedly in admonition for giving away most of his hard-earned salary to strangers. He'd kept almost nothing for himself.

By the time he climbed the ancient, creaking stairs to his third-floor residence, he surprisingly couldn't find the fortitude even to unlock the outer door to go inside. Instead, he just stood there. While hunched over the railing that loomed above a dark and dingy stairwell, he saw his mother essentially materialize overhead. Even as a disembodied spirit, she didn't seem pleased with the nonstop, charitable choices he made throughout the years.

After all, she spent her entire life teaching each of her children to be frugal and save every penny that they earned for their old age. So as he had given everything away to the needy, she was certainly upset to see him as being the needy one now. Consequently, it didn't surprise him in the least when he saw her frowning face shaking back and forth in dismay.

As a response, the weary rabbi endeavored to block her image from entering his mind. Unfortunately it was to no avail. He instead began sobbing uncontrollably while countless, regrettable recollections continually intensified their pervasive presence upon every thought forming within his mind. During those seemingly endless moments, flashes from years past exploded upon his consciousness as intensely vivid visions occupying all of his inner sight. They echoed episodes from a lifetime now appearing as nothing more than decades spent in fruitless, futile, and lonely pastimes.

Needless to say, he never married and therefore had no children to comfort him in his old age. He spent decade after decade always focusing upon those in greatest need. His obsession to assist others and help them out of every personal crisis became the sole purpose for living. Yet, now he was questioning whether or not any of his prior efforts actually made a difference to all those whom he spent decades helping.

Because of his nearly compulsive preoccupation with the welfare of his local community,

he always remained oblivious to the dozens of women who constantly vied for his attention. He also seemed to have no awareness of their amorous and admiring glances continually being cast in his direction. Moreover, he never seemed to realize why so many of them brought him constant gifts.

They continually prepared meals for him and offered to run errands even when such runs to the stores weren't even required. In fact, they weren't necessary for any conceivable reason at all. In reality, it never occurred to him that the main purpose so many of them chose to help him with various chores was so they could find the slightest excuse to speak with him and be in his presence as often as possible.

Only now, after decades of ignoring all such prospects for marriage did he suddenly feel that perhaps his entire life somehow had been wasted. But merely after a few sparse moments of wrestling with these inner outcries of self-pity did he quickly revive his typically robust convictions. Resilience took hold of him once more and compelled a pair of obedient hands to insert his apartment key into its slot. He then turned the latch and pushed the door open.

After taking off hat, coat, and scarf (and subsequently tucking them neatly into the hallway cupboard), he proceeded towards the bedroom where immediately beginning his matter-of-fact, nightly conversation with God. Speaking aloud in the tongue of his beloved mother—resonating familiar sounds reminiscent of the *old country*—he commenced by greeting his divine benefactor in Yiddish. The English equivalent to this particular discourse went something like this: "Great and benevolent God, Lord of the Universe, I want to talk to you about things weighing heavily upon my heart tonight.

"You know that I have always tried to live my life as a good Jew and have served you as a devoted rabbi for almost fifty years. In all of this time, you know that I have never prayed for myself but always have asked for help to benefit others. Truly, I always maintained that prayers should never be used for personal gain. But oh my God, I am really in serious trouble now.

"I will be celebrating my eightieth birthday very soon but have almost nothing to celebrate

with. My entire life's savings has been used up to aid those in need greater than my own. So now there's naught left for retirement and it seems that this time I must ask you something on my own behalf.

"Yet despite all of this, if it is truly unacceptable for me to pray for myself and make such a bold request now, please tell me quickly and I will never mention it again. But if it is permissible, then I must beg you to help me just this once. It may sound like an absurd, selfish, and pointless plea, but can you please let me win the lottery?"

For days on end the kind old rabbi waited patiently for a response. But week after week drifted by; and even as countless months faded into the past, he still heard no answer to his prayer. There weren't even the slightest signs signaling an indication of either approval or displeasure with this personal appeal.

Why was God silent for so long? Was he offended by such a request? Did he feel that this entreaty was simply too self-serving and therefore undeserving of a reply? So many questions continually raced through a constant wave of his muddled thoughts; but regardless, God gave him not even the slightest hint of an answer.

Amid this extended silence from his celestial mentor, the rabbi's financial condition continued to deteriorate rapidly. It did so to the extent that he was afraid of being evicted from his apartment. Sadly, he was three months behind on his rent. His unpaid credit card debt had been taken on by a collection agency, and his utility bill also was long overdue. In fact, the electric company had been leaving phone messages informing him that his power would be shut off on the following Monday.

With all of these burdens piling up around him, it felt as though he were finally coming to the end of his rope. It also seemed to be pushing him steadily towards the edge of all sanity. Although he was normally considered to be a very patient and quiet man, he now felt inordinately angry for the very first time in his life. It was in this crucial moment that he actually began yelling at God.

He complained about how for months he had been asking for heavenly assistance. He begged over and over again that if his personal requests were inappropriate, then all he

wanted from God was to tell him to stop praying for his own necessities. In an increasingly heated monologue, he mentioned more than a dozen other grievances about how God seemingly had deserted him in his greatest hour of need. After spending countless minutes griping and moaning in an inordinate display of misery, he finally screamed out ultimately exasperated: "CAN YOU PLEASE JUST LET ME WIN THE LOTTERY NOW!?!"

Without warning, a stunning silence suddenly swept over every meagre fragment of himself. Amid this unexpected stillness, even the clattering street sounds (those audible intrusions from out-of-doors, forever sifting through the flimsy walls of his apartment) evaporated unsuspectingly into an emptying, all-embracing quietude.

He found himself inexorably succumbing to serenity. This surrender instantaneously compelled him to relinquish all earthly toils and vast decades of uncertainty. In their place, an eternal instance of grace emerged above each muted heartbeat emanating from within his aging breast. Subsequently, an inexplicable peace embraced him in a manner that was like no other comfort he had experienced before.

But to further amplify such a wondrous, audible shift in the atmosphere surrounding him, there also shone a piercing radiance. It ripped downward through the very fabric of his bedroom ceiling while immersing the rabbi's physical presence within a sea of light nearly palpable to his touch. These transformations of both body and spirit removed all anguishes, regrets, and fears that have troubled him for decades.

While he immediately was feeling more joyous and hopeful, an otherworldly presence simultaneously materialized just beneath the ceiling and directly above where his rickety, old bed was located in the room. As soon as the rabbi saw the majestic face tenderly gazing down upon him, he knew instantly that it was the face of God.

Naturally, the rabbi was elated. This sacred vision had to be a sign that all of his prayers about winning the lottery would finally be answered. Now, he could rest easier at night knowing that there would be a sure way not only to support himself for the rest of his life, but he could also continue helping his community in better ways than ever before.

With much excitement and enthusiasm, he began thanking his merciful benefactor for

such a miraculous appearance. He started to speak about all the urgent issues concerning the people for whom he cared; and despite the fact that he was almost eighty years old, he revealed all of his hopes and dreams about how he might continue assisting them during the next twenty years.

Even though God's ageless countenance continued smiling with approval during the rabbi's entire appeal, he never uttered a single word in response. But when the old Jewish teacher finished speaking, he looked upward into the eyes of his ethereal visitor while awaiting a much anticipated answer.

Nevertheless, God's only response was a noiseless nod reinforced by an ever-broadening smile. The rabbi finally mustered enough courage to ask, "Aren't you going to say something?" In reply, God answered sweetly, "What would you like me to say?"

"I don't know exactly, but maybe it would be nice to hear some encouraging words or perhaps a simple validation to my most pressing question: Will you please help me win the lottery? I need to support myself while helping others as much as I can."

But God gave no response for several minutes. Finally, the kind, old rabbi became unexpectedly impatient and blurted out, "Why aren't you willing to give me a straight answer? What have I done to deserve this evasiveness? Why won't you lend a hand?"

To this final question, he heard a confusing and somewhat disquieting rejoinder: "I will help you if you will help me". But then the rabbi exclaimed, "How can I be of help to Almighty God? I'm but a lowly old man! What could I possibly do to assist the Lord of the Universe?"

However, God didn't reply. The rabbi's dearly beloved mother surprisingly appeared next to the divine Master and began to speak in his stead. She displayed a conspicuous air of annoyance while waving her fists in the direction of her son.

The rabbi looked back at her in utter bewilderment and said, "Why are you so angry and what does he actually want from me? How could I possibly assist him with anything?" Slowly shaking her head in further consternation, she then chirped out in her distinctly flavored accent. It was reminiscent of the broken English frequently spoken among those

immigrants living in the predominantly Jewish enclave just a half-mile from there:

> "He can't help you until you do something for him first." "But mama, what could I hope to do for him so he'll help me win the lottery?" At this point, his mother was so vexed that she began to sputter. "He only wants you to… You just need your… If you don't do… It can't happen unless…"
>
> "Mama, what are you trying to say?" "Ach my dear, dear boy—sometimes you can be so much a nudnick for such a bright and scholarly a man. Almighty God, save us all!
>
> "Why are you being so thickheaded? It's plain and simple, even for your dead old 'muter'. The answer's right there under your own rabbinical nose. For my sake, for heaven's sake, and for the sake of all mankind: GO BUY A TICKET ALREADY!"

Even though the preceding, final few sentences were obviously intended as the punchline to this anecdotal tale, they are also part of an underlying narrative that signifies something much more sobering—especially when considering this story's connection to the mind garden and the conscious gardeners residing within it. The aforementioned fiction can be seen potentially as an allegorical tale hinting at the unfortunate outcomes that can stem from our unwillingness to let go of dualistic perceptions (like a hapless rider grasping desperately to the mane of a frenzied runaway horse). We delude ourselves into believing that we are embracing those very things that are supposedly important to us, while in fact our focus is totally misdirected and isn't aimed on them at all.

Instead, we essentially have mistaken some counterfeit notions for what we truly wanted to embrace in the first place. Throughout the above parable, because of the rabbi's increasing desperation regarding his lack of money for retirement, panic and fear drew him into obsessing about winning the lottery. This became so desperate and extreme that he lost sight of the fact that no miracle from God could ever help him receive money in such a manner until he went out and actually bought a ticket!

Anyone of us can so easily skip a simple yet vital step for manifesting all of our hopes because we fail to look beyond our own *finger*—the proverbial finger pointing at that ever-elusive *moon*. We can become so infatuated by our ill-conceived notions that we wind up missing or distorting the crux of the matter altogether.

Frequently, through self-righteous faith and zeal, we can totally overlook the need for

being truly conscious, the necessity for actually being mindful at all times. We forget and ignore (or never learned how to, in the first place) to believe and ultimately to act through divine love exclusively. For it is only in this manner can we plant, grow, and harvest the fruits of every genuine insight and understanding that we may have plated and cultivated in the first place.

Although many of us may not be able to relate personally to the preceding two stories (and their characters), the underlying messages nevertheless can remind us of, resonate with, and aid us to reflect upon many other fervent, self-righteous convictions, presumptions, and pastimes to which we forever cling. Instead of bringing us closer to what our hearts hold most dear—and our convictions hope for us to fulfill—we ironically can cast ourselves further away by *finger-pointing* judgments, hypocrisies, false assumptions, and callow illusions. Our unwitting and oftentimes sanctimonious behaviors can contaminate any supposed good intentions and their corresponding actions.

That being said, religions and religious beliefs do not have a monopoly on *finger-pointing-at-the-moon* activities or the endless number of *I'm-right-your-wrong* mindsets. As many of us might surmise, these attitudes and actions are also cultivated readily in politics, science, medicine, sports, finances, and every other sort of human undertaking; and they do so as the dualistic seeds cast upon our mind garden's inner soil.

Notwithstanding, we should still remind ourselves of the potency of such deceptive clutter we can cultivate within any overzealously religious (or nonreligious) disposition. While recalling once again Emo Philips' amusing satire, we can be reminded of how totally destructive outcomes can arise from any prejudicial judgments existing within our well-practiced, personal belief system. They can certainly help us in remembering the dichotomous potential lying dormant within every *I'm-right-and-you're-wrong* assertion we make (also manifesting regularly as we mindlessly *point our finger towards the moon*).

For example, when we aren't vocally disagreeing with others, then we often pronounce our judgmental dissents silently to ourselves—no matter how offhanded or insignificant they may seem to be at the time. Even when we are attempting to promote a more inclusive and tolerant slant on how we promote and display our convictions to the outer world, underlying dualistic thoughts may also be embedding themselves into our internalized beliefs simultaneously. And we often manufacture some sort of faked ideal or superficially virtuous excuse to justify such things.

Without attentively practicing how to *weed out* or undo these types of behaviors,

dichotomy-generating thoughts may dominate all inner and outer activities in which we engage ourselves on a daily basis. Aside from affecting everything we act upon and say openly to others, they will also influence and possibly determine the outcome of each underlying thought we generate and practice while eating, sleeping, discussing politics, promoting our spiritual or secular convictions, advocating or condemning the latest technological advances, watching our favorite television shows, talking on the phone, texting messages, washing dishes, taking a shower, and even the seemingly innocuous pastime of engaging in daydreams.

From personal experience, there have been countless times in my life when people would regularly confront me with their own personal versions of *I'm right and you're wrong*. These particular examples were systematically brought about by multiple variations on the *finger-pointing-at-the-moon* scenario.

When I was young, if I said *thank goodness* to some self-professing *Christians* that I knew (while they no doubt were unconsciously pointing their judgmental *fingers* towards the *moons* of their incomplete and ill-informed religious beliefs), instead of feeling happy that I was expressing myself with praise and gratitude, they felt compelled to point out sanctimoniously that I wasn't a true believer unless I trained my praise directly to the creator himself by exclaiming aloud:

Thank God.

So, after I dutifully adjusted my choice of words to be more in line with their way of thinking, then others would subsequently pontificate to me by shouting out:

No, it's better to say *thank you, Lord*!

There was even a time after I adopted this exact phraseology to avoid any more confrontations in the future when there still were those who felt inclined to rebuke me with further admonitions comparable to this next one—even while *pointing* their finger at God to justify their insistent reproaches:

It's best if you express your gratitude by calling out directly to the Lord by saying *thank you, Jesus*!

Actually, the first time that this sort of sanctimonious scolding occurred in my life was when I had just turned six years old. I happened to be talking with my maternal grandmother

by including the word *God* in my response. She then looked disapprovingly and curtly reproached me in an overzealous tone:

> Never just say God, always address him by name: *Jehovah*!

A few years later—when my grandmother was harping about the same matter to one of my cousins—I naïvely pointed out to her that *Jehovah* is only one of multiple translations of an earlier version of his name in possibly Hebraic. But when adhering to more orthodox traditions, God's true name should never be spoken aloud or written down, because if anyone uttered God's most sacred name or spelled it out on paper (or onto a stone tablet, papyrus, or parchment in earlier days), the infinite power released by engaging in such an act would obliterate the entire universe. It was considered the ultimate blasphemy to even consider it. On hearing these remarks, she scowled at me and walked away in a huff.

Certainly, there is no divine love generated in such a reaction and only seeds of more dualistic antagonism and futility are generated instead. This is just another instance of how it's so easy for us to be entrapped within the *I'm-right-and-you're-wrong* duality as well as displaying symptoms of the equally weed-ridden *finger-pointing-at-the-moon* illusion.

I have often been rebuked throughout my life because of many other similar semantical trivialities. Or as my dear old *Granny M* (my father's mother) used to say:

> People always like to make mountains out of molehills!

Furthermore, there were people from a variety of belief systems who I knew—including various Christians, Jews, Muslims, Baha'is, Buddhists, and various strains of atheism as well—who all had accosted me with similar antics from time to time. Even while talking to a scientific researcher (with humanistic tendencies), immediately after mentioning the word *creation* to him, he informed me that there was no such thing as creation. Soon thereafter, he then announced in an utterly affected manner:

> If you want to have a rational conversation about the **universe** with me, don't insult my intelligence with your asinine religious jargon!

Along this same line of picayune and semantical debating, while some spoke to me about visions, others insisted that the word hallucinations was the only accurate and appropriate term to use. And when I dared to utter anything about miracles occurring, such pronouncements

were often ridiculed and countered with a myriad of remarks such as these:

> Miracles don't exist. They're either coincidences, flukes, wishful thinking, or out-and-out fabrications. When someone claims a miracle has happened, it's just not possible. They're more likely to be anomalies that are being played up!

Despite the criticism I endured when speaking about the validity of miracles, there nevertheless has been a considerable amount of research done since then on the subject. Over the years, a substantial amount of evidence in the form of written documentation, photographs, and videos (even beyond the testimonials of firsthand witnesses) have validated many of the cases where miracles were thought to have happened.

Of course, there too have been many reports of false or faked occurrences, but this is true with anything at all in the world that is considered to be unusual or exceptional—having the potential of being capitalized upon in some way. Regardless, viewing all miraculous events as being shams or the unconscious contrivances of wishful thinking is a generalization that could be considered as simply the product of subjective, cynical biases and wishful thinking as well.

The following is yet another example from my life of how—without the presence of divine love—so much misunderstanding and discord concerning specific words can lead to discord and possible harm. Our verbal forms of communication overflow with such potentially charged words, capable of shaping a distorted reality of dualistic *weediness*; and this often stems from the seed of one, seemingly innocuous thought.

In my mid-twenties, I gave a reading of some of my original poetry at a local boarding school in central New Hampshire. I presented it to the entire student body as a gift to the school—waving my normal fee for this type of performance.

All of the kids and the entire faculty were enthusiastic, attentive, and demonstrably appreciative for my efforts except for one particular woman. She happened to be a cofounder of the school who decided to interrupt the performance while I was still in mid-sentence. Apparently, she was somewhat of a vocal feminist (unbeknownst to me at the time) and surprisingly spoke out in a disruptive and unfitting manner—raising her voice loudly enough so everyone could hear her:

> I'm not a man; I'm a woman.

As I stopped reading and everyone began gaping at her in shock and disbelief, she said

nothing more for what appeared to be a deliberately orchestrated pause before repeating her unexpected pronouncement once again. But this time those lips of hers turned upward into a noticeable sneer as she spoke both sarcastically and with noticeable condescension in her voice:

I'm not a man; I'm a woman and will always be a woman!

What apparently provoked her outburst was when she heard me recite the word *mankind*. However, the root of the word *man* shouldn't have caused such offense because it clearly referred to *man* signifying species rather than the potentially more sexist connotation indicating gender.

Regardless of the fact, if she truly felt it necessary to express here concern for my having selected this specific word, she could have done so in a responsible way that wouldn't have been a disturbance to anyone else who attended the event; and it definitely would have made her a far-better role model for her female students to follow.

Furthermore, if she really wanted to be a truly mature feminist instead of someone lashing out in a rather sexist manner herself (considering the fact that she knew full well that there was no malicious intent in my recitation while there was plenty of smugness aimed directly at me during her deliberate disruption), she could have waited until the end of the reading and quietly taken me aside, because then I might have been given the opportunity to explain that I had already considered using other word choices such as *humanity* or *humankind*, where the root *man* is better disguised. Unfortunately, neither of those options would have been suitable choices since they both had too many syllables and therefore would have proved to be an unwanted distraction in regards to the overall flow of the verse.

Because she wasn't planning to add anything else constructive to her initial assertion—even after the performance had ended—I felt obliged to assuage everyone's palpable discomfort by addressing her remarks at the very end of the performance. It seemed like the only moment left to point out certain of my own observations concerning the tiny word contributing to such an unfortunate and jarring interruption—especially because many people in the audience were still visibly upset and even annoyed by that woman's blatant discourtesy—this included all of the female students.

Consequently, I made some closing remarks, thanked everyone for attending, and also added the following:

It's clear that my use of the word *mankind* really upset one of you because the root of

> *mankind* is *man* and its placement is rather conspicuous while being the first syllable. For that, I humbly apologize and ask all of you now to offer any suggestions for a more appropriate word to replace *mankind* that wouldn't interfere with the movement of the poem or reduce its effectiveness in any other way.

Since no one made any suggestions other than when several students and teachers simultaneously voiced their approval of my present word selection, I then proceeded further by saying:

> That being said, there's another important issue that warrants being examined. Because the definition for the root of *mankind* evidently refers to species rather than gender, I would think anyone concerned with sexist implications would find another word much more offensive, even though the person who spoke out during the performance used it with a great deal of pride and enthusiasm.
>
> Of course, I'm speaking of *woman*. Unlike *mankind*, the root *man* in the word *woman* doesn't refer to species but the male gender instead. For a concerned feminist, this word should definitely seem to be extremely sexist.
>
> After all, the origins of *woman* come from the Old English *wifman*—pronounced *vīf′-mən*, meaning the *wife of man*—and the Middle English *wiman* (pronounced *wĭ′-mən*), indicating the same.

I then concluded by mentioning that an English professor once showed me an early pronunciation and alternate source of the word *woman* itself. Although the spelling has remained the same, it originally was pronounced *vō′-mon* and referred to all women as being none other than the *woe of man*, pertaining to the Biblical creation story.[20] While I have never again seen any other citations that might corroborate the validity of that last reference, the mention still seems to be at least a possibility of being factual nonetheless—considering the other aforesaid etymologies of the word have indeed been well documented.

---

[20] In this instance, *vō′-mon* refers to the Garden of Eden story in Genesis where an eternal woe was put upon the first man *Adam* (and all of his descendants) by his wife *Eve*. This legendary curse arose when she supposedly seduced him into partaking of the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Good and Evil while they still resided in the garden.

Theologically speaking, this act was referred to as original sin and was the reason why God cast both of them out of paradise. Furthermore, it is what allegedly brought mortality to all of humankind by instigating the insidious duality of life and death. Finally, the use of the word *woman* blatantly and ironically displays how the underlying dichotomies of sexism have infected the English language since its early stages of development.

In any event, whether this definition is added to the others referenced here, *woman* persists as being unarguably one of the most sexist words in the English language today. And it oddly continues to be tolerated (and even embraced) by so many females of our species who are still unconsciously carrying with them this antiquated emblem of subservience. Unfortunately, I don't know of anyone who has come up with a solution to modify or change outright said expression that wouldn't cause still more friction and hostility than this divisive little arrangement of five letters has already beset upon us.

Before proceeding further, it is worth adding one more detail to this story. Several months before reading my poem for the kids at that private school, I gave an informal performance to another group of students and their teachers in my home where an almost identical outburst took place. However, during this earlier event, I hadn't yet revised the poem to include the word *mankind*. Initially, the word originally selected was simply *man*—again, referring to our species rather than gender.

When I first finished writing that poem, I showed it to a distinguished poet who lived nearby. During that period of my life, he generously took me under his wing, so we spent many thought-provoking hours together conversing, reciting our original poetry for each other, and engaging in friendly debates over a wide range of topics.

On one particular evening (after dining with him and his wife), I asked them about this issue concerning whether or not to use the word *man* in that poem. They both agreed it would be the most appropriate and effective choice for the phrase in question. Even though I understood their reasoning, I still had reservations about actually doing so. My hesitancy proved to be well-founded once being confronted by those two women in the performances I gave soon thereafter.

When the first incident occurred during the informal reading presented in my home, I immediately realized I had made the wrong decision to use the word *man* and that is why I decided to substitute it with *mankind* before reciting the piece anywhere else. It is well to understand that my elderly poet friend was of an earlier generation—one which had little or no awareness of anything sexist at all. In fact, the social norms of the early twentieth century generally accepted a wide assortment of prejudices and intolerances of every kind.

That being said, after I started using the word *mankind* instead of *man*—especially once those harsh objections about using even *mankind* were made to me publicly—I couldn't find yet another alternative that might possibly be a suitable replacement. *Humanity* or *humankind*

simply wouldn't fit at all. After making numerous attempts at further revisions, nothing seemed to solve the problem regardless of my concerted efforts to do so. Eventually, there appeared to be no other alternative than retiring the entire poem to a filing cabinet; and consequently, I never shared it with anyone else again.

Despite coming to this seemingly final decision, I did consider that perhaps I might discover an effective solution resolving this semantical conundrum at a later date nevertheless. But when I did finally decide to do more editing of the text years later, that massive flood in my house destroyed nearly all of my poetry so any plans for making further modifications to those writings were quashed completely.

Aside from all the preceding examples of mindlessly utilizing words to reinforce the *I'm-right-you're-wrong* duality and engage in the unconscious and compassionless exercise of *finger pointing at the moon*, how many other infinite number of words, ideas, and even the most basic of thoughts have also been used by so many of us with having nothing less than a profoundly adverse effect on our own lives, and even on society over-all? With this in mind, it would once again be well to remind ourselves of how truly powerful the nature of thoughts, words, and ideas actually are—and to remind ourselves of this important little phrase once again:

Words make worlds.[21]

And as conscious gardeners, it is a vital task for us to select our words with great care as well while mindfully tending and cultivating thoughts reflected and reinforced by our words. This is especially true since they further manifest into our actions, and ultimately into either compassionate manifestations or mindless, weed-ridden, and duality-producing outcomes.

In any event, the incidents just mentioned (along with the several instances touched upon earlier) are simply a minute fraction of all the semantical, judgment-ridden traps that plague our lives on a daily basis. As conscious gardeners, it is vital for us to no longer sow mindlessly those dualistic seeds of the I'm-right-you're-wrong variety—including when we are pointing a judgmental and self-righteous little finger in the vague direction of our illusory, so-called *moon*.

But now, let us interject into this serious discussion a brief moment of levity by addressing these issues from a lighter perspective. Back in 1937, the American lyricist Ira Gershwin wrote

[21] From *Becoming Wise* by Krista Tippett.

the words to his brother George's tune, "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off".[22] These ageless lyrics playfully poked fun of how we can get so hung up over even the tiniest semantical differences—including the divergent pronunciations of those otherwise-insignificant words mentioned in the song. However, when displaying such seemingly inconsequential disparities in real life, they can be transformed into outright antagonism and hostility merely by our insistence of always being right while condemning everyone else as being wrong.

Here is a short excerpt from that song:

You say *eether* and I say *eyether*,
You say *neether* and I say *nyther*,
Eether, *eyether*, *neether*, *nyther*,
Let's call the whole thing off!

You like *tomayto* and I like *tomahto*,
You like *potayto* and I like *potahto*,
Tomayto, *tomahto*, *potayto*, *potahto*,
Let's call the whole thing off!

Whenever we are compelled to correct, manipulate, or even putdown anyone else—regardless of whether our intentions are deliberate or unconscious—it is important to realize that the existence of divine love will be disengaged with (or deactivated) in such a practice. In fact, even if we participate in these types of interactions unconsciously, never realizing how thoughtless, unkind, condescending, judgmental, or simply inappropriate our words and actions have become, we therefore are not being mindful gardeners at all.

Instead, we remain a part of the massive, jumbling hotchpotch that strangles and feeds upon love's blossoms rather than responsibly assuming our rightful role of conscious caretaker—mindfully restoring and strengthening divine love's cathartic presence everywhere. We are simply proliferating more weediness in its place. Even when we participate in such potentially weedy discourse while supposedly only *jesting*, are we honestly speaking within a veritable context of love or is there some other disguised or subliminal motive that is instigating more dualities into our lives?

---

[22] This Gershwin tune was first introduced in one of Hollywood's classic films: *Shall We Dance*. It starred Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers and was released in 1937.

At this juncture, it is imperative to remember once again this quote from I John in the New Testament:

> Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Consequently, when we are correcting others out of a sense of false-piety, self-righteousness, intellectual superiority, or just supposedly *joking*—in as much as to ridicule, malign, or put down someone without having to admit the true intent of our words and actions—there is no love to be found in any of it at all.

Instead, we are feeding doses of deception to ourselves and to others. Even when we attempt to understand and correct these things by refraining from saying such criticisms aloud (but still allow them to run rampant through our thoughts and emotions), we are doing nothing other than proliferating self-righteous, self-fertilizing seeds of duality rather than nurturing and caring for our garden's essential blossoms with divine love. Therefore, until we can remedy these unbalanced behaviors—by practicing consciously, consistently, correctly, and completely—our essential role as mindful gardener will continue to elude us.

- Chapter 7 -

Awareness Unfolding

I.

A process of transfigurations...

So as to resolve the issue of countless dualities forever cluttering and confusing our lives, it is imperative to recognize them as the weeds they are in actuality and be able to distinguish them from all of our desired plantings that we consciously intend and truly need for the balance and health of our mind garden and—therefore—for our individual and collective *realities*. Accordingly, none of these dualistic weeds should be permitted to take hold unintentionally so only the seeds and plantings of divine love and its derivatives can thrive. But this will require of us to tend and nurture them constantly, as it would with any physical garden we might wish to cultivate out-of-doors.

Once we mindfully begin to remove any illusions that have lured us away from the potential verities of this *garden* of ours, then we must convert without hesitation those extracted weeds into what might figuratively be deemed as our *compost for compassion*. To achieve this, we should ask ourselves about all the negativities needing to be eliminated from our lives, from the world, and even from all existence.

Although, while we are still inexperienced inquiring about accomplishing such serious practices, it would probably be most effective to start with only a few personal questions, so as not to become overwhelmed by having too many things to consider at first. After all, we can always broaden the scope of our queries once we become familiar with the process.

However, it is equally important to realize that we will need to weed away not only all of those negative attributes we find to be present in our lives, but their dualistic opposites and seeming antitheses as well. That is why it is essential to employ a second affirmation for also dispelling those *outwardly* constructive things previously thought to be the desirable *alternatives* for ourselves.

Speaking aloud such a consciously designed affirmation and prayer, we next must *plant*

a statement, an intention, a belief, and a conviction of genuine, non-dualistic compassion. Simultaneously, it is essential to *fertilize* all of these mindfully conceived statements with a highly emotionalized empathy electrifying the entirety of our being and the sum total of everything around us. Finally, it is equally important to insist that each element weeded out has instantly been transformed into divine love and subsequently fed back into the garden (as being both all-conceivable and inconceivable), until even this final duality—of that which seems both possible and impossible—transmutes into genuine love *in the twinkling of an eye*.

At the outset, to weed away what would otherwise be conceived as something positive, harmonious, and loving most likely will appear to be counterintuitive. However, if we wish to remove negative things such as discord and sorrow from our lives, it also is crucial not to think that this will happen if our goal is to strive after their seeming opposites. We would do well to take into account the real nature of those outwardly appearing desirables. They are also a key part of both our dichotomously functioning seesaw apparatus and the Tree of Good and Evil—otherwise, the tree of duality.

Any ostensibly positive qualities of balance, peace, and love after which humanity incessantly chases remain the *veritable* illusions of authentic balance, unfeigned peace, and divine love. In truth, they are not at all the blessed attributes for which we yearn. As I have already emphasized repeatedly, these tend to be merely their counterfeits instead.

They are merely unbalanced hybrids created from an intermingling with inconsistency, worry, fear, judgment, control, manipulation, divisiveness, anger, hurt, jealousy, retribution, and regret—to name just a few. They will bind us to one end of that misleading seesaw until the underlying influences of resentment, contempt, hostility, and even hate also penetrate those greatly coveted *illusory positives*. Such so-called positive ideals of balance, peace, and feigned *love* must ultimately cast us back over to the other (presumably more negative) side of their seesawing conundrum.

It is imperative to remind ourselves constantly that the bona fide plantings in this garden never have a conflicting counterpart. In fact, anyone who practices and masters being conscious gardeners actually has no antithesis either. For our existence here, in this mindful state of performing as veritable caretaker, is also part of the truth that forever blossoms within this garden.

Ironically, the more we understand our role as the conscious gardener, we will find that such an identity simultaneously reveals to us our equivalent function as also being the garden's

blossoms—forever flowering within the unity of divine love and compassion. Anything else is merely rehearsed contrivance manifesting dualistically as each perceived weed of separation and illusion hides this ultimate truth from us.

The more we practice that our thoughts can readily convert dualistic manifestation into actual outcomes of unifying compassion and divine love, the more our subsequent beliefs in these types of thoughts and ideas will become steadfast in our hearts and minds. Consequently, it is at such a juncture when it will also become apparent how said insights readily bring about the means needed to transmute all of life's dualities into an infinite manifestation of conscious love—and will do so with radiance and wonder.

II.

How to distinguish wheat from chaff...

Throughout Chapter 6, we became more familiar with the diverse nature of duality and will continue studying and appraising its qualities throughout the upcoming sections in Chapter 7. Many personal examples—as well as more wide-ranging instances—will be presented to demonstrate how such models potentially affect and *infect* every aspect of our lives. To eliminate these *weeds* that are oftentimes nearly impossible to differentiate from the actual flowers, vegetables, fruits, and herbs (all those being cultivated as divine love and its wide-ranging attributes), it is essential for us to discover and develop as many of our potentially useful perceptions as we can in order to recognize the weedy, dualistic vegetation from all other plants existing within this garden of mind.

As we delve into our exploration of how to remove any such *weediness* from the world, we must continue searching further into identifying duality's vast abilities to disguise and accelerate its evasive, illusory behavior. Because of the vast extent and diverse characteristics of these insidious garden weeds, it might also be helpful to mention here that the current

chapter is in some respects simply an extension of the previous one. This will further allow us to examine how duality has always infiltrated and undermined much of our thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, actions, and continues to permeate and redefine every aspect of our individual lives and all of the rest of material creation in what appears to be an endlessly chaotic fashion.

It is important to learn as much as possible about the vastly varied dichotomies that we harbor (as individuals and as a collective) and how essential it is for us to recognize them readily. It is equally important to learn how to activate, employ, and enhance our unique sensory apparatuses, which forever dwell within ourselves—often in both a dormant and undetectable state. But once we discover how to awaken and amplify these hitherto unknown perceptions, they will eventually reveal to us how we actually have always dwelt (and will always continue dwelling) in utter compassion and divine love.

And, there is one final thing to consider here while we are becoming aware of these capabilities for the first time. Each of us must recognize that not only are we the veritable gardeners who are essentially obliged to consciously tend this mind garden of ours, but all of us together are the potential fruits, flowers, herbs, and vegetables that likewise are bequeathed upon our gardener personas forever to maintain and nurture.

III.

Utilizing or neglecting our five physical senses, the entire body, and all perceptions operating beyond such finite parameters...

Currently, I still live in northeastern Vermont. In that isolated cabin where I continue to reside, there is almost never any genuine reason for me to speak aloud—especially, since I am not predisposed to the pastime of audibly debating with myself—so it tends to be a relatively

common occurrence not to open my mouth nor talk with anyone else for days or weeks at a time. This is not the first occasion in my life when such a routine had developed.

During the 1980s, I was given my first major commission to compose an extensive chamber music piece.[1] I returned to central New Hampshire after a brief stay in New York State and Connecticut. Then, I was able to find a living situation where I would become the caretaker of an old, remote farmhouse in exchange for staying there. That overly large and dilapidated property on the Baker River became somewhat of a retreat for me nevertheless.

A philosophy professor had just commissioned me to compose a musical setting for several of my poems honoring his former wife. She had died both suddenly and tragically. So, while residing there for several months, I composed a forty-five minute chamber sonata for soprano, cello, and piano entitled *Sonata Requiem*.

At the time, I frequently had stretches when I never spoke at all. During an intensely rigorous writing binge in midwinter, I was so completely involved in the work at hand that I simply didn't utter a single spoken sound for fifteen days. On a bright winter's afternoon, after being immersed in an extended wave of creativity (compelling me to compose nonstop for more than ten hours), the telephone suddenly started to ring. It took me totally by surprise because I hadn't received any calls for many weeks. After picking up the receiver, I recognized instantly the voice of a friend.

However, when I tried to respond to her greeting, not even a whisper exited from my mouth. Indeed, I couldn't speak at all. After several determined shots at saying *hello*, I didn't know what else to do other than hanging up the phone.

For the next half-hour, I persisted in coaxing some semblances of squeaks and squelches from a totally muted set of vocal cords. At first, it was quite alarming. I remained voiceless despite my most single-minded efforts to produce yet the tiniest of perceptible rumblings from within.

Eventually, I was able to blurt out a brief succession of embarrassingly hoarse-sounding squawks. Despite the fact that I happened to be in reasonably good health—and there was nothing wrong with my speaking voice at the time either—I still found it nearly impossible to utter even the slightest noise within the parameters of any detectible audibility whatsoever.

---

[1] According to Wikipedia, "Chamber music is a form of classical music that is composed for a small group of instruments—traditionally a group that could fit in a palace chamber or a large room. Most broadly, it includes any art music that is performed by a small number of performers, with one performer to a part (in contrast to orchestral music, in which each string part is played by a number of performers). However, by convention, it usually does not include solo instrument performances".

But after hundreds of attempts, exercising my *vocal equipment* for the first time in more than two weeks, I once more was able to produce a complete sentence spoken aloud. At the time, the thought occurred to me how all of our senses can become virtually inoperative, simply after a somewhat negligible period of nonuse.

Once I had practiced talking again for over an hour, my voice seemed strong and steady enough to return my friend's call. After explaining to her why I had to hang up so abruptly, we laughed together quite jovially about my recent predicament.

But in the end, a sobering fact also became clear. All of our physical sensory organs are so fragile that they might unexpectedly atrophy at any moment, from lack of use. Without constant practice and exercise, they can easily fall into a surprising state of dysfunction.

She and I were both very active pianists at the time, so we certainly recognized how important regular practice is to maintain a specific level of competency on any musical instrument. But the situation with my speaking voice made it perfectly clear that everything in life also must be practiced, or the dualistic reaction of *inoperability replacing functionality* will eventually occur; and in some cases such as this one, it can happen much more quickly and dramatically than anyone might otherwise suspect.[2]

In recent times, I have had several other experiences where my vocal chords failed to produce any sound due to prolonged periods of nonuse. Yet, once I started working the voice again, it gradually returned to normal.

Aside from these situations when my speech became totally muted from lack of practice, there were also numerous other incidents where my eyesight had been affected similarly. Every time I went walking at night for hours with no headlamp or flashlight to guide me, as soon as I returned to a place illuminated by streetlamps, car headlights, or illuminated buildings, it always took at least a few minutes of focusing on objects before my vision responded normally again. In some instances, if I had been hiking all night long in total darkness (without any aid of illumination whatsoever), it occasionally required even as much as a half-hour for my eyes to function correctly once more after re-exposing myself to a well-lit environment. After all, each of us can attest to having been exposed to darkness for only a few, brief seconds, and it still took many moments to restore our normal vision after our eyes were suddenly subjected to a

[2] I cannot confirm whether or not such an outcome would happen for other individuals remaining totally silent during a similar timeframe. After all, I never knew anyone who hadn't uttered even a single *croak* for such an extended interlude. Nevertheless, a total inability to speak most certainly did happen to me temporarily until I began exercising my vocal chords once again. This phenomenon also occurred a few other times during similar periods of my life. However, this particular instance was the most striking and is the reason for my describing it here.

light source once again.

Aside from my own experiences, there are many stories about prisoners locked away in lightless cells for years at a time or people who became trapped belowground in cave-ins. It oftentimes took weeks for them to regain proper vision once more. In some instances, certain victims could never totally reclaim their ability to focus, even with the aid of corrective lenses. Just imagine if there were situations that might deprive us completely of using our hearing faculty, our sense of touch, or our sense of smell. Similar types of recoveries presumably could be expected as a result of such unimaginable situations.

Furthermore, whenever any other type of physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual activity, task, or process is discontinued, comparable aftereffects are apt to occur. This happens in sports, musical performance, public speaking, writing, meditating, and likewise with cooking and accomplishing other mundane tasks. In fact, it is liable to occur with everything that presumably functions in our world.

Indeed, some recovery times will obviously be much longer than others. But we must also consider how much or little practice has been done with those supporting or interrelated functions that potentially could aid or hinder in backing-up and re-strengthening whatever has fallen into disuse. Similarly, it is equally beneficial to discover what other inner and outer resources might combat any arising forms of inoperability produced by neglect, in order to recognize those aspects of ourselves that can assist in accelerating recovery times.

An unmistakable example would be to compare the injuries of a well-trained athlete in peak condition with similar ones incurred by someone who is unhealthy, inactive, and consequently out of shape. It is a no-brainer that the athlete's convalescence most likely will be much quicker and more complete. The injuries incurred by the other individual would almost definitely necessitate a greater time to mend, possibly requiring extra follow-up therapeutic and/or surgical interventions not necessarily needed to rehabilitate the athlete. This is obviously due to the fact that the physically well-developed person is already well-practiced in developing and maintaining vitality, flexibility, and strength—attributes which also promote accelerated healing.

But aside from these considerations, there are also mental, emotional, and spiritual conditioning upon which to reflect, and not just the more obvious physical therapies and exercising required for effective recuperation. Constructive or counterproductive practices within each of these non-physical levels of every human being can also help or hinder the overall

capacity to mend fully.

In any case, whether we are athletically inclined or not, there are numerous intangible practices of belief and intention (such as faith, hope, joy, perseverance, inspiration, and gratitude) that are well-documented as being important factors for expediting the ability to repair ourselves. Without these added influences to bolster those who are convalescing, both bodies and minds have been known to slip into atrophy and disrepair—causing our injuries to fade more slowly, or not at all.

For each of us, when we suffer bodily damage of any kind, there is yet another factor that is highly influential while we are attempting to heal. The physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual input conveyed through thoughts, words, and actions that family, friends, acquaintances, or even total strangers can directly (or indirectly) convey to any of us who are going through the process of mending.

What kind of support or hindrance will they provide during recovery? Even though they think that they are being helpful, does any of their assistance essentially conflict with the actual healing process? Do they give us confidence, moral support, and inspiration or do they tend to criticize, nag, demean, and demoralize us instead?

There can be countless other factors in such integral, intertwining connections. If the effects of those influences are also well-practiced, they can even be a determining factor of whether the outcome is miraculous or disastrous in nature—or cause any degree of success or failure between those two, more-dramatic, dualistic seesawing ends of wonder and calamity.

Now, let us return to a personal example of when I applied various practices to expedite healing. I already spoke about this particular incident in an earlier chapter, but it would be useful to expand upon it further at this time.

Before my untimely accident when I broke my ankle in the wilderness, I had been hiking extensively for several months. Consequently, I was ultimately faced with a very serious injury while being in excellent physical shape at the time. Despite the fact that I also became homeless and had experienced the total loss of my career, a secure place to live, the larger portion of my material possessions, and almost the entirety of my professional and creative portfolios, my emotional and mental states remained relatively resilient, nonetheless. This was due mostly to the fact that I persisted in meditating, contemplating, and praying throughout each day for

many hours—during the entirety of my *bout* with homelessness.[3]

Therefore, I simultaneously had been consciously exercising physical, mental, emotional, and particularly spiritual fortitude and resolve every day for much of that year. In the end, I made a full bodily recovery in a fraction of the time predicted by the orthopedic surgeon. Because of the extent of my injury, I was told that it could take up to nine months to heal fully; yet, I recovered and was discharged from the doctor's care in only six weeks.

As soon as I was brought back into my hospital room after the surgery, I began implementing a gentle form of *physical therapy* on my own. What I initiated might seem frivolous and inconsequential to some, but the doctor concurred with me after the fact that it actually happened to be most beneficial and highly important for expediting the healing process.

Since I was a captive in bed with my lower leg in a hospital cast, wrapped in ice, and raised up into the air, I nevertheless began wiggling my toes constantly up and down. In fact, after steadily increasing this seemingly insignificant exercise over the next three days, I finally settled on wriggling my toes precisely two thousand times per day.

As my lower body began to strengthen, I continually added new routines and steadily increased the amount of repetitions for each drill. During this period, numerous people seemed shocked when I told them about the number of reps that I managed to do regularly. The usual question put to me after mentioning two thousand daily toe wiggles was:

> Who has time for that?

But the only logical response I could give them seemed apparent:

> Other than watching TV, taking pain killers, and sleeping, what else was I supposed to do while being held hostage in this infernal hospital bed?

After all, I still found myself too heavily medicated even to read or meditate. Moreover, what possible infringement upon my time could there be if I always performed this simple workout while simultaneously entertaining myself with an excessive and mind-numbing dose of watching television much of the day?

At the time, these two seemingly unrelated activities—pursued simultaneously—actually

[3] This is not to say that I didn't suffer enormous trauma from such a severe turn of events. But because I did spend so much time in deep reflection, I certainly had emotional and spiritual resources that most likely kept me from more destructive outcomes people often succumb to while falling into vagrancy and indigence—such as a mental breakdown, drug addiction, or even suicide.

complemented one another surprisingly well. After all, the only reason for indulging myself with any television viewing whatsoever was that I had essentially become a captive audience. Aside from this brief period in my life, I almost never incorporated TV shows into my life since I left my parents' house decades earlier.

Whenever it became too tiring for me to exercise, I simply stopped and rested. But instead of giving up altogether, I always resumed training until my daily goals were accomplished. It didn't matter if the task took two, three, five, or even seven hours to complete. I just reminded myself to rest in between segments whenever and for however long it was needed to do so.

If I found that my daily goals became too strenuous or unattainable for any reason, I merely revised them. Certainly, it was beneficial to continue challenging myself. Yet at the same time, it also seemed necessary to remain vigilant and level-headed against overdoing these self-styled *workouts*.

The physician's initial prognosis indicated that I would be in a hospital cast for several weeks, but he surprisingly replaced it with a regular cast in less than one. Instead of being in that standard cast for a minimum of three months (as was predicted earlier), my doctor fitted me with a walking boot only after about thirteen days.

The boot should have remained my constant companion for another several months, but it actually was substituted for a light-weight ankle brace in roughly four weeks. By the sixth week, I shed the brace altogether and began walking normally once again. Initially, he told me that I would remain under his care for six to nine months, so it did seem quite amazing to be discharged only after a few, short weeks.

During my entire convalescence, I practiced several times per day relearning how to walk. Whenever fatigue set in, I simply would sit down and rest, even if only after a few steps. But, instead of giving up and going back to bed, I would resume walking again. Throughout this process, I gradually extended my walking time to multiple hours each day.

Aside from adhering consistently to a stringent physical regimen, it also proved beneficial to pursue a constant mental, emotional, and spiritual practice as well. A very important element of this inner routine was to continue meditating daily, emptying my mind of all the recent traumatic events that disrupted my life. This included the death of my beloved dog, the demise of my entire business, the catastrophic flood, the loss of many of my material possessions, the destruction of most of my creative work (including the first rendition of this book), and a life-

altering destitution and homelessness that followed.

After regularly weeding out these hardships mentally by emptying all thoughts of such things through meditation, I then discovered how to refill myself at will with an encompassing, rapturous, and luminous electrification of my physical body—one which I presumed to emanate from the source of all true inspiration and divine love:

…the pervasive, underlying soil found within the mind, within our ever-present mind garden.

While in this state of highly charged vibrancy, I envisioned my physical body as being totally healed. Also, as I reinforced this practice with very specific prayers, accompanied by other potent affirmations and visualizations of healing and wellbeing, my physical injury faded away into a quick and complete recovery.

However, I unfortunately became so focused on mending my leg and ankle that the tendency was for me to downplay and shortchange the much-needed healing process of my mental and emotional states as well. After all, I still remained displaced, penniless, and continued to suffer with serious post-traumatic stress from the many great losses I had experienced of late.

Therefore, it took a much longer period of time to restore myself both mentally and emotionally. But once I was able to recognize completely that more spiritual forms of exercise were also needed to recover well beyond just my physical injuries, I then could finally proceed forward once more on the long track towards the comprehensive healing of every aspect of my being.

IV.

An audible mystery: blurring and merging "times" and "spaces"...

Aside from having endured being reduced to a homeless state during two other equally critical stages of my life, I have also resided in more than thirty-five different locations during the past seven decades. Most of them were situated in eastern New York State or northern New England.

While remaining in three of those locations, I witnessed countless, enigmatic events that have been heralded by some as being otherworldly, transcendental, and spiritually uplifting. Yet by others, those same instances were seen to be nothing more than hallucinations or exaggerated perceptions of reality—even though a great number of those experiences were observed not only by me, but also by students, friends, and relatives. Nevertheless, a couple of the more skeptical and combative personalities I knew at the time actually insisted that it was impossible for any such things to exist at all. They had to be untrue and therefore totally fabricated.

At the beginning of my only marriage (one which lasted for nearly a decade), my beloved bride and I moved to a small cottage near the Connecticut border on the New York side. We drove there immediately following our wedding. Although I was still nineteen at the time, it also happened to be less than three weeks before my twentieth birthday.

Thirty miles north of that cottage were the beautiful Berkshire Mountains and the southeastern corner of Massachusetts. Our peaceful and pastoral *love nest* was part of a modest estate owned by a middle-aged couple from Long Island. They tended to use the large, adjacent house as a weekend getaway from their normally hectic lifestyle in the city.

As newlyweds, we were extremely fortunate to have been invited to reside in such a lovely place, especially since it was to be our very first home; and we had no extra money to spend on a honeymoon beforehand. From the upstairs porch, there was a panoramic view looking out over a wide expanse of the western hills. Frequently, we were graced with countless, breathtaking sunsets. So, it were as though we began our life together living in an ongoing

honeymoon.

At a time when rental properties were nearly impossible to find, and in a place where even tiny apartments were prohibitively expensive to procure, our kindly landlord offered us this lovely bungalow for the unbelievably nominal rent of $120 per month. The downstairs included an average-sized bedroom with an adjoining crib room,[4] a small dining room, and an adjacent kitchen and bath. The entire upstairs comprised of a single, sizable living room. With its vaulted ceiling, this large area became our music studio as well. Since we were both musicians, its favorable acoustics were ideal for our daily practice and rehearsal sessions.

The few years spent living in this little house were very happy ones. But after a while, we no longer found it reasonable to live so far away from work and school. Our daily commuting finally became too exhausting, time-consuming, and financially impractical to maintain. Besides, the landlords were putting the property on the market to sell, so it was inevitable that we would be compelled to move regardless.

But during our wonderful time spent there, we had been witness to an endless array of mystical happenings and seemingly *paranormal* phenomena. There was one particular encounter of ours that reminded me of some of the *Twilight Zone* episodes on TV.[5] Our own unearthly *episode* occurred only days before we were scheduled to move away.

Many other exceptional experiences happened to us while staying in that little cottage, but it would take dozens of pages to explain just one of them. Although the following incident definitely wasn't the most spiritually meaningful or lifechanging event to transpire during that portion of our lives, I decided to describe it here nevertheless. Simply put, it persists in being highly relevant to this chapter; it is also reasonably brief and definitely worthy of retelling.

Late one evening we were in the bedroom packing up most of our clothing. The date for our relocating closer to New York City was fast approaching, so we often had to stay up long after midnight, making sure that all of our belongings would be ready for our friends and family members who volunteered to help us move on the appointed day. As this particular evening stretched into the wee hours, we began to hear Big-Band-style jazz tunes playing in the background. It seemed to be coming from our kitchen, which happened to be at the other end of the house. Oddly, over the next half-hour or so, this music slowly started to increase in

[4] In earlier generations, it was a small bedroom for infants usually adjoining the master bedroom.

[5] Written and narrated by screenwriter Rod Serling, this popular TV series aired during the early 1960s and reruns have been broadcasted for decades.

volume all by itself.

Finally, it simply became unbearably loud for both of us, so I volunteered to go and turn off the radio. Speculating what might have caused the amplification of this music to increase so radically on its own, I eventually surmised that perhaps there was a malfunction occurring with the volume control. But shortly thereafter, I realized that any such assumption had to be incorrect because the only FM receiver in the house always remained in our bedroom. Besides, that radio had been unplugged earlier and packed away shortly thereafter.

It goes without saying that we both wanted this unanticipated disruption to end as soon as possible. Therefore, I headed off to the kitchen to find the cause and (hopefully) a simple solution for the situation at hand. Instead, once I stepped through the bedroom doorway into our dining area, a peculiar and dramatic change occurred.

Abruptly, the volume of the band's performance had been reduced to a somewhat muffled, more-distant background noise. The sudden change transpired even while I was approaching the alleged source of the sound. This peculiar audio dampening resembled the effect that a thick wall might have—if such an invisible barrier had unexpectedly and instantaneously materialized between my location in the house and from where the music supposedly had been emanating.

Because this audible shift took me so much by surprise, I immediately went back into our bedroom where the sound was still blaring nonstop. I then asked my wife to come into the dining room with me. At once, we both experienced that same anomaly. So, continuing to travel back and forth between the two rooms, we began to speculate how these bizarre variances could be happening consistently over and over again.

Being caught within such an odd situation, our curiosity continued to rise understandably. We ventured back into the dining room where the music volume promptly plummeted nearly in half. As always, the noise still seemed to be stemming solely from the kitchen. Yet, when we finally proceeded into the kitchen itself, all of the audible commotion vanished; and the entire house became totally silent for the first time in nearly an hour.

We then returned to the dining room where the same jazz tune could be heard, seeming to originate from the kitchen once again. Paradoxically, the music sounded as though it were coming from somewhere far away, even though this elusive broadcast also gave the impression of emerging just a few feet from where we were standing.

At one point, my wife decided to stay in the bedroom while I scurried back into the

kitchen. Even though she could hear the music wailing from the other end of the house at peak levels of intensity, the kitchen was totally quiet for me as long as I remained in that room. After going back and forth through the house several more times, still finding no answer to all of this dimensional *weirdness*, we finally resigned ourselves to a brief fit of laughter, shrugged our shoulders, and then resumed packing up the bedroom.

Eventually deciding that the time for us to retire was long overdue, we quickly got ready for bed and shut out the lights. However, the ever-intensifying music persisted playing. Neither of us could endure the situation any longer so I reached over to our table lamp and immediately turned it back on.

The only way that we were ever going to get any rest that night was to bring our blankets upstairs into the living room and close the stairway door behind us. Hopefully, the ruckus coming from below thenceforward would be suppressed sufficiently so we could at least doze a bit before dawn.

However, the moment that we came to this decision, the music stopped and a radio announcer began talking for the very first time. With this unexpected change, we both listened attentively to what was being said. It immediately became apparent that the man spoke with a clear and distinctively British accent and was introducing a live program airing from the BBC in London, England.[6] When the music suddenly ceased, the volume dropped to a much more tolerable level straight away. This allowed the speaker's voice to come through clearly with no distortion whatsoever.

The greatest surprise for us was to be listening to a live, European program coming over the airwaves in the United States, because there were presently no stations airing any programs from outside of the country. The only way to listen to such a broadcast back then in the early 1970s would have been to tune in directly to the BBC itself, with the help of a special short wave radio set.[7]

Matters readily became even more bizarre when a surprising newsflash from 1944 came pouring across the radio waves. American troops apparently had just landed at Normandy and were in the process of establishing a permanent beachhead. From there they would attempt to liberate the rest of occupied France from the Nazis before pushing onward into Germany.

---

[6] The British Broadcasting Company.

[7] Although I did own a shortwave radio when I was a teenager, I had given it to one of my cousins when I first went away to college several years earlier.

It were as though my wife and I might actually be witnessing the commencement of the Allied invasion into Europe during World War II. Consequently, we just stared at one another in disbelief. How could it be possible? After all, the massive attack took place years before either of us were born. Once this extraordinary announcement from the past had been completed, the entirety of that ghostly transmission slowly dwindled into a vacant inaudibility while we both continued to imbue the ether with each of our innumerable and unanswered questions.

Whenever I disclosed this account to friends and acquaintances over the years, they frequently insisted on providing me with an explanation about how such an occurrence actually could have happened. Consistently, two simplistic and somewhat oversimplified answers were usually given.

The first one always went something like this. The signal for that 1944 newscast was transmitted out into space and somehow found its way back to earth decades later. Certain unique properties in the location of our cottage must have acted as a temporary radio receiver, so we were essentially able to experience a unique and historically significant snippet from humanity's otherwise inaccessible past.

A second justification for all of these paranormal peculiarities was insisted upon by a few of the more cynically-minded people who heard this story. According to them, the entire incident simply had to be an auditory hallucination experienced jointly by my wife and me. Because of their own prejudices concerning things that they never happened to witness for themselves, no one else therefore could have experienced such a freak incident either. Consequently, the event simply didn't occur and had to be the result of some sort of mutual mental-conjuring by my wife and me instead.

However, both of these claims never seemed truly convincing because neither of them explained many of the particulars at hand. And when those making said claims tried to rationalize what they were saying, their ensuing justifications were vague, incomplete, and inconclusive at best.

After all, both arguments were concocted on the spot without any deliberation or concerted scrutiny. Their opinions were merely impulsive responses based on preconceived and unsubstantiated notions. Such impulsive reactions could be seen as nothing more than the result of grasping at straws to validate both their vague and monochromatic ways of thinking. Moreover, these predominantly rationalized oversimplifications raised many questions of their own—in addition to those that they supposed were being answered by their weak assertions.

For instance, out of all the conceivable billions of hourly broadcasts that have been aired over the decades, why should this rare, historically significant, and universally recognizable clip be the only one that just happened to find its way back to earth decades later and air itself in our little cottage? What structural, geological, and/or environmental attributes in that specific location could instigate the unlikely transformation of our small and insignificant kitchen into a virtual intergalactic radio receiver? Despite the fact of how any transmission could actually broadcast its way to that insignificant place at so unlikely a time, what other factors really initiated the transmission volume to vacillate so weirdly (yet so consistently) while we travelled back and forth between our bedroom and the *presumed* sound source in the kitchen; and why did those fluctuations in volume persist in such a counterintuitive manner?

Additionally, if this situation indeed were a jointly hallucinated occurrence for both of us, we would have had to experience the same things simultaneously throughout the entire event. There could never have been a time when each room influenced what volume level either of us might be hearing rather than our maintaining an identical perception of those complex shifts in sound. This should have remained true regardless of whether we lingered in the same room hand-in-hand or were separated from each other by the doorways between the bedroom, our dining area, and the kitchen beyond.

Most importantly, every time either or both of us entered into the kitchen, the broadcast was interrupted by a sudden silence straightaway. All things reported by the radio announcer during those specific moments consequently were never heard by whosoever remained in that room. Yet, each time we chose to step back across the doorsill into our dining room again, the music or newscast would resume mid-phrase. It is highly unlikely that an actual mutually fabricated mental mirage could manifest in a manner so completely dependent on these intricate, ever-shifting juxtapositions.

After thinking about this incident for decades, it finally occurred to me that there perhaps was another, more plausible reason why such an occurrence manifested there. First of all, during the several years when we lived in that little cottage, it also happened to be the time when both my wife and I meditated more than at any other time in our lives. Each of our five physical senses certainly improved then, aside from developing more intuitive and esoteric perceptions as well.

Because I worked at home and she normally had to commute to work, I had the advantage of a considerably more flexible schedule even when I still spent part of my time

commuting to college. Nevertheless, my *sitting* practice could easily be fit in between work, my academic obligations, and my ongoing musical studies. This allowed me the needed time to meditate many more hours than she could fit reasonably into her regular routine. Also, since my wife had excellent sleeping habits, there was no need or urgency for her to stay up all night attempting to extend further her own meditation practice.

At one point, she actually did endeavor to meditate much of the night with me on several occasions, but within minutes she simply fell asleep during each attempt. So instead of her habitually dozing in such an uncomfortable position, it became our custom to retire to bed and spend some intimate time together; but once she had finally fallen asleep, I would then return to the living room and resume my nightly ritual.

These several extra hours of meditating certainly were of much more importance for me to have at the time. After all, my wife always slept soundly and was in excellent health. Since chronic insomnia plagued me throughout the entirety of my childhood and adolescence, extending my meditational practice throughout the entire night greatly improved my physical and emotional well-being. Actually, I started feeling well rested each morning for the very first time in my life.

Quite frankly, *sitting* in this regular nightly state of mindfulness replaced much of my need for sleep. If I hadn't implemented this nocturnal sacrament, the illnesses from which I suffered then (also being exacerbated by ongoing sleeplessness) most easily could have ended my life prematurely. This is something that my then-current physician also emphasized to me on several occasions. Consequently, I might not be still around to write about it now.

Despite the fact that my wife's meditational practice was considerably less than my own, our joint abilities to experience exceptional phenomena together did increase significantly nonetheless. In fact, there may have been many occasions when those unusual happenings wouldn't have been observable without our mutual abilities simultaneously intact and continually reinforced by consistent practice.

V.

Defeating nightmares, altering outcomes through lucid dreaming, and blessing souls trapped in a realm of shadows...

Before my meditating expanded enough to replace much of the normal requirements for sleep, there was another problem (other than chronic physical illness) causing my earlier, seemingly unending struggles with insomnia. From infancy up until I was about twenty-one, I had habitual nightmares oftentimes on a nightly basis. Even when they were not quite this frequent, they still occurred no less than twice per week.[8]

Needless to say, as a very young child I developed the habit of staying up as late as my body could endure until I finally would collapse onto my pillow out of pure exhaustion. As a result of this serious problem, I tended to resist my parents whenever they attempted to put me to bed at night. The idea of lying down became a constant source of anxiety.

Many of the nightmares were unduly terrifying and exceedingly brutal. During my adolescence and young adulthood, I recall reading certain materials and hearing radio discussions mentioning that if anyone experienced death in a dream they actually would die instantaneously in real life. I since had come to the conclusion that this pronouncement must be totally fallacious, because I had experienced my own death in nightmares hundreds if not thousands of times for more than two decades.

I witnessed myself being murdered, tortured, killed accidentally, blown apart in mine fields, and even ritually sacrificed in a variety of sordid ways. I had been shot, stabbed, mutilated, dismembered, beheaded, buried alive, drowned, crushed, thrown off buildings,

[8] It is important to note here that during my childhood (before moving into the home my father built for us when I was eleven), we lived on a country estate in a tiny apartment inside of a barn—something mentioned earlier in the Preface. There was a miniscule, closet-like space where my brother and I shared a junior bunkbed at night. He took the lower berth and I slept in the upper one.

Just a few feet from each of our pillows, there was a poorly sealed door that exited the apartment into a large work and storage area where my father kept trucks, tractors, and other machinery and equipment. Consequently, gasoline and other chemical fumes constantly leaked into our bedroom. Since I slept closer to the ceiling than my brother did, I tended to get a significantly heavier, more concentrated dose of those toxic fumes every night of my life for over a decade.

Years later, when I was discussing this with a physician, I also described my earlier, chronic nightmares to him as well. In response, he mentioned how exposures to certain toxic chemicals (including carbon monoxide) could cause nightmares as a serious side effect. However, there were no known remedies to alleviate the problem at the time.

pushed into spiked pits, and set afire. Moreover, these didn't include the countless forms of torture my dream persona often suffered before death finally took me in each instance.

Frequently, I even experienced my own funeral; and when I wasn't in a coffin or spread out upon a funeral pyre, I instead might be observing the ceremony from high overhead or weeping alongside a host of other mourners. But there were more than a few times when I would view myself leaving the corpse behind—only to wake up in a fit of uncontrollable sobbing.

Some of these dreams I definitely experienced as an *in-body* phenomenon. However, there were countless other instances when I endured the event from an *out-of-body* location. It was almost as if I were a bystander witnessing my own death as a nonparticipating observer. Yet, the horror and pain were felt intensely throughout my entire physical body nonetheless. Despite all of those earlier reports asserting that a personal death encounter in a dream would trigger an instant end to the dreamer's actual life, I still survived all of my own *dreamt deaths* and continue living even while recalling many of them more than a half-century later.

Once I began meditating during the typical hours set aside for sleeping (soon recognizing that these nightly meditations seemed to be replacing my need for regular sleep), I eventually became more hopeful about the prospect of possibly overcoming this horrible phase of my life altogether. Not only did I start to believe that there might actually be a way to rid myself of the seriously painful bodily infections, high fevers, severe upper respiratory distress, and my debilitating cycles of sleeplessness, but that a viable solution could possibly end the endless succession of chronic nightmares too.

However, one of the most dramatic changes suddenly occurred after what had transpired on a certain commute home from my university studies in suburban New York. While driving northbound on the local interstate, I began listening to a radio interview.

It started by introducing a psychologist in California who specialized in the study and treatment of chronic nightmares in children.[9] Obviously, this was a topic that immediately piqued my interest. Since an exit ramp to a nearby rest area was fast approaching, I veered off of the highway and parked my car for the remainder of the program.

No longer can I remember the many details of that broadcast now, but there still remains one vivid segment forever imprinted upon my mind. The doctor had discovered a particularly

[9] For the sake of validation and accuracy, I attempted to find out more about that particular psychologist once having decided to include her story in this book. On numerous occasions, I used libraries and the Internet in an attempt to rediscover her name; but as of yet, I have been unable to find any relevant information. My research capabilities while living in this relatively isolated region of the country have definitely been limited, aside from the fact that the radio interview in question happened more than fifty years ago.

effective routine for her patients. Since their nightmares almost always thrust each of those traumatized sufferers into a condition of being victimized, tortured, and often vanquished by an invincible foe, she had them recite aloud the following statement as they were preparing to sleep:

I am victorious in all of my dreams.

After saying this straightforward affirmation for only a few nights, many of her subjects soon noticed either a complete cessation of the nightmares or a substantial reduction in their frequency and intensity.

Although there were some doubts about how such an effortless decree could trigger so enormous a change, I nonetheless was eager to find a way to free myself of such an incapacitating affliction. Therefore, I immediately began to use the technique that same night—only a few hours after hearing about it on the radio.

Once having begun to practice this simple exercise every night for a week, I was astonished to discover that I hadn't experienced a single nightmare during the entire duration, except for the dream immediately following my first attempt at reciting this statement. Actually, since starting my practice of saying those amazingly innocuous words decades ago, I have never once had another nightmare since then.

This is not to say that there were no more troubling dreams ever again. On the contrary, I often discovered myself in *night visions* filled with anxieties and difficulties. However, I always was able to vanquish any foe and it indeed did seem as if there were a consistent aura of being *victorious* in every outcome.

Despite these overall improvements in my dreams, they also tended to leave me with the residual effect of incumbering my subsequent, daytime hours with enormous fatigue. At times, it seemed to me as though instead of sleeping I were up all night battling with and ultimately defeating one belligerent rival after another.

However, when I analyzed the psychologist's actual words in her bedtime affirmation—soon after adopting it as my own—I then wondered if by slightly altering her statement a more effective result might be obtained. After all, one of the key words in this simple *mantra* was to proclaim being *victorious*. But in order to be victorious, the implication of overcoming a conflict or some sort of battle appeared to be an inevitable component and didn't seem necessarily indicative of achieving a more restful and restorative dream state.

Therefore, was affirming myself always as the victor actually re-instigating a condition of constant struggle, despite the positive effects with which it obviously provided me? This appeared to be true even though the aspect of achieving victory every night ostensibly did eliminate the more terrifying tendencies of being victimized, tortured, or killed during my previous dreams.

Once the assessment had been made to choose a more innocuous statement before retiring at night (something which took me several more years to discover and perfect), an amazing shift was finally able to occur once again. My new affirmation—modified numerous times over the decades—has developed into a mantra that, in more recent times, often goes something like this:

> I am perfectly joyful, healthy, peaceful, and protected in all of my dreams.

And whenever I felt the need to be more expansive and all-inclusive in my preparation for sleep and my waking into the next morning, I would instead recite the following statement or something similar:

> In all of my dreams and waking moments, I am perfectly joyful, healthy, happy, inspired, filled with peace, always secure, in perfect balance with all that is, and consciously one with divine love. All other persons, beings, creatures, and animals in my dreams and in waking life are also perfectly healthy, happy, inspired, filled with peace, always secure, and consciously one with divine love.

I often swapped this mantra with a nearly identical prayer. So not only might I say this statement to pronounce a conscious belief in the materialization of my thoughts, but I also practiced supplicating for their actual unfoldment into the world—with a brief offering of thanksgiving at the end of it. As was mentioned in the fourth section of Chapter 5, four of the numerous tools (included in the first *list of ideas*) that are useful to *seed* thoughts into the garden of our mind and allow them to *grow* and manifest into the blossoms of physical reality are simply to **affirm**, **invoke**, **give thanks**, and **believe**.

The only difference between the above mantra and converting that mantra into a prayer is that there would be a few additional words added at the beginning of the statement and a few more attached to the ending. For easy comparison, here is one of several prayer derivatives written below:

> Dear Lord, I ask with a humble heart that in all of my dreams and waking moments, I am perfectly joyful, healthy, happy, inspired, filled with peace, always secure, in perfect balance with all that is, and consciously one with your divine love. Also, please bestow upon all other persons, beings, creatures, and animals in my dreams and in waking life your blessings of perfect health, happiness, inspiration, and well-being complete with an abundance of peace, security, and consciously as one with your divine love. And for this blessing I give thanks, Amen.

These simple adjustments to my bedtime affirmations made one of the most dramatic shifts that has ever manifested for me personally. Even after my first adjustments to the psychologist's suggested affirmation, my sleep-state immediately began to transform from a constant source of tragic discord into an ongoing sanctuary of healing and restoration. On rare occasions, I still might have a slightly weird or disturbing dream once again; but this now-anomalous condition almost always had been caused whenever I happened to choose to refrain from (or forget) the recitation of one of my prescribed affirmations on a day-to-day basis. But as soon as I resumed the practice of saying them at bedtime, my *dream-life* instantly transmuted back into a complementary realm of relative comfort and peace.

At many junctures I often found it more effective to use only a single, brief statement rather than employing the more detailed affirmations comprising multiple sentences. And aside from the ones mentioned above, the following, short declarations tend to be my favorites among all of the others that I have mentioned.

However, from time to time, I would select one or another of the lengthier affirmations for a week or two so as not to fall into a bored or disinterested mindset resulting in a mechanical recitation of these briefer statements without any feeling or conviction. For optimal results, I found it most useful to begin my chosen avowal while lying in bed with my eyes closed—or with eyes opened if the phrase was still not memorized—to say it aloud as quietly as needed so no one else could hear the words (a means of maintaining a sense of privacy), and energize myself while speaking those words in a relaxed fashion, over and over again, until my gradually emotionalized condition became strong enough to generate goosebumps all over my body. At this point, I always remained in that electrified state for at least several prolonged moments before allowing myself to drift off into sleep.

The following is the first of my favorite, brief affirmations:

Whenever I sleep, all of my dreams leave me joyful, well-rested, and filled with peace.

Yet another one goes as follows:

In all of my dreams, I am divinely protected, always blessed, and filled with happiness.

And the most recent statement that quickly became yet another of my favorites is this one:

Divine love is the source, substance, and outcome of all my dreams.

Some might think because they have never suffered from nightmares that they really can't imagine why it would be necessary for them personally to recite such things before going to bed at night. However, if we subscribe to the belief that thoughts affect our lives either directly or only indirectly (and I suspect anyone reading so far into the book has at least a notion of the possibility that this may well be true), then to prepare for entering sleep with consciously conceived transformational thoughts would be much more advantageous than simply falling into slumber with the unconscious influences of stressful thoughts, or ideas and images of worry, annoyance, and fear with which we are still engaged from our daily activities—whether or not we accept their actual continuation within us. Therefore, wouldn't it be simple prudence to consciously instill the thoughts we wish to affect our dreams and our lives rather than merely becoming the quarry of those things that we have unwittingly attached ourselves to each day?

Long after the early days of my childhood when I first began having those habitual nightmares, there began to develop one other ongoing occurrence that impeded my ability to sleep well. The most peculiar component of this particular situation relied totally upon the actual place where I happened to be living at any given time. It regularly transpired in very specific locations. I frequently found that after moving to a new home these incidents might suddenly stop altogether and only recur once I had moved to yet another place.

Unlike the nightmares of my youth, these so-called disturbances tended to increase in frequency later in life. The place where I experienced the most intense and regular occurrences of this unnerving brand of inexplicable phenomena was in the mountain home that eventually was flooded in 2007.

Like most other things disrupting anyone's ability to sleep, this puzzling situation always happened whenever I got into in bed, turned out the lights, and closed my eyes. Within a split

second, I would begin to see one disturbing visage after another. Their inescapable presence upon my *inner eye* was enormously persistent and they never faded from sight until I might eventually fall asleep from total exhaustion. Night after night they appeared without cessation. Some people might refer to these visitations as evil spirits plaguing me. More so-called *pragmatic* individuals certainly could interpret such encounters as nothing more than habitual hallucinations.

Regardless of how we might define them, literally thousands of these distinct countenances definitely resembled a multitude of the most destitute and forgotten people on earth—not unlike those wandering aimlessly through back alleyways of any urban slum. A few of them did appear to me more frequently than most of the others, so their features became recognizable. But the majority constituted an endless, anonymous parade of sad, distraught, depraved, emaciated, crazed, angry, belligerent, disfigured, and terribly afflicted personages.

Because they always visited me whenever I attempted to fall asleep in a darkened room, I eventually adjusted my schedule so that most of my appointments could be managed in the evening, many of them after dark. Then I would continue all of my other private, independent work through the wee hours until dawn. Accordingly, I almost never had to shut my eyes again after nightfall.

By adopting this somewhat unconventional shift in my daily routine, I slept exclusively during daylight hours. This allowed me to rest unimpeded for the first time in years. It also shielded me from the unrelenting barrage of specters that always seemed ready to torment me. Moreover, once I actually could sleep soundly on a regular basis, my dreams normally remained peaceful, happy, and soothing. I consistently woke up feeling refreshed. After all, my earlier nightmarish disturbances had been totally resolved decades earlier.

Some may well argue that it might have been much less complicated if I took some sort of medication every night. However, most types of drugs always gave me serious allergic reactions and predictably would have triggered an acute upper respiratory infection among other things. I most definitely considered countless options, but from decades of experience with matters concerning my own sleeplessness, this option chosen in the end I deemed to be the most beneficial by far.

Once the flood disaster occurred and I became homeless soon thereafter, an unexpected change happened when I was forced to sleep in my car for several months. I no longer saw any of those faces after closing my eyes at night. Maybe it was because my location simply shifted

almost every evening, or perhaps this relief happened because there oftentimes was a fair amount of light entering the car from nearby streetlamps. I never determined the reason for this sudden twist. But, in light of the personal upheavals facing me at the time, seeing no troubling faces at night certainly turned out to be a most appreciated and unexpected gain.

However, once I came to live in that remote cabin in northeastern Vermont, the band of nocturnal beings slowly began to reappear at bedtime. But because I also had been meditating again more heavily than I had done in years, insights came to me with much greater frequency and an unexpected solution soon started to unravel in my mind.

I suddenly remembered those compelling words of the minister who first introduced me to Saint Francis decades earlier.[10] She emphatically said never to be afraid of or disturbed by anyone or anything that appears to us metaphysically. Simply greet them, ask them what they want, offer them blessings, and then gently insist that they go on their way.

Once I remembered this simple procedure, these troubling faces seemed no more threatening than all of those people I prayed for while traveling the subways of New York or walking along the decaying streets in riot-torn, inner-city Baltimore. It also brought to mind the remarkable African man who actually came up to thank me by name for my silent mediations that were made on his behalf.

These recollections brought about an obvious and simple solution. Whenever I wanted to fall asleep again, I knew exactly what had to be done. The following night, after lying down in bed and shutting my eyes, a very angry-looking man instantly appeared before me. Then a distraught and emaciated boy joined him; and finally, a seriously frantic elderly figure also came into view.

Instead of trying to force them out of my sight mentally as I had become accustomed to doing previously, I looked directly into their eyes and greeted them with love. In a flash, each of their faces softened and they simultaneously called out a shared *hello* in return. After that, I immediately asked them why they were coming to me every night. The spokesman for these three moved into the foreground and (amazingly) began a tragic tale of how they were imprisoned and didn't know how to free themselves from their current plight.

My silent thoughts inquired further why they chose me and their answer was quite simple and direct:

[10] The story of how I first met Saint Francis of Assisi was mentioned in a lengthy footnote found in Chapter 3.

> Most people who we sought help from looked through us as though we were invisible to them. But you always appeared to notice our faces and we sensed this about you right away.

In response I asked:

> Then why didn't you just say something so I might understand?

They immediately said sympathetically:

> We were just as much afraid of you as you seemed to be of us.

Then I wondered aloud how I could assist them and they answered:

> All we need is for someone to give us hope, comfort, and a compassionate word. You can set us free.

So, I immediately offered a silent prayer and made a blessing upon them. In reply they immediately smiled and wept with joy. Thanking me repeatedly, their transformed images softly faded from my sight never to return.

Once they had moved on, a multitude of others soon came to fill the void that the departure of the first three created in my mind's eye. It immediately became apparent that I wouldn't be able to have conversations with the countless throngs who were then lining up to speak with me. Instead, I addressed all of them at once, greeting each of those expectant faces warmly, and uttering an intersession of love to heal their hearts and liberate their minds. After that, many of them expressed their sincerest gratitude and quietly evaporated into the ether.

Occasionally, a few faces still have appeared to me in more recent times as I attempted to fall asleep; but now I can speak to all of them as friends and offer my support wholeheartedly. Their responses usually are those of appreciation and relief. Immediately, they go their own ways and allow me to fall asleep—both quickly and with relative ease.

Quite frankly, it doesn't matter to me if these *visitations* are labeled by others as figments of my imagination, hallucinations, psychotic delusions, displaced spirits, lost souls, entities within a parallel universe, beings existing in an alternate reality, or elementals actually appearing from another plane of existence. What really does matter is that whenever, whoever, or whatever may confront us in each potentially problematic situation, it is vital to refrain from ensnaring anyone or anything (including ourselves) within the usual, well-practiced reactions

of judgement, prejudice, hostility, distrust, and fear.

Whenever we categorically choose to substitute our delusory, dread-induced habits with compassion instead, then all of those fear-related experiences separating us from everything else will fall away—even if they are nothing more than manifestations similar to those disturbing faces appearing in my mind's eye every night. So, by guiding our corporeal selves to operate solely within the bounds of divine love, then those stressful and illusory circumstances (where any isolating times, distances, and spaces can hinder, ensnare, and potentially harm us) instead will readily collapse *in the twinkling of an eye*.

This is what transpired when Anne Sullivan painstakingly taught sign language to the supposedly unteachable deaf and blind girl Helen Keller. With enormous dedication and love, she placed Helen's hand alternately under water and then signed the word *water* into her palm over and over again. Anne persisted in doing this until Helen's lack of comprehension *jumped* wondrously into a new state of awareness and understanding.[11]

Additionally, this is also what happened at the nursing facility in Germany[12] when the caregivers decided to build a simulated bus stop as a painless and gentle way to lure their dementia patients back home from their wanderings. But in a broader sense, it likewise manifests whenever each of us reaches a state of loving kindness that enables all of those seemingly inexplicable, ageless transformations in our individual and collective lives—those which only occur through either the conscious or unwitting enterprises of an unguarded, sincere, and compassionate heart.

Ultimately, these are the cosmic *jumps* where all of us can realize the potential of who we truly are. From day to day, we actually do manifest limited and subtle glimpses into these shifts in our reality. Such simple and oftentimes unrecognized awakenings frequently appear as a transient yet timeless joy or even as a fleeting, mere moment of dreamlike perfection.

They can be compared to when a gardener is weeding a very thick patch of brambles and suddenly discovers several exceptionally bright blossoms hidden amid that dull cloud of underbrush. Granted, these fragrant buds are wondrous to behold whenever we rediscover them, but their utmost beauty and purpose can only be realized in a lasting way when the garden is restored in its entirety; and even though we eventually will remove all of the weeds,

---

[11] Refer back to Dr. Goswami's reference to Helen Keller in the quote on page 417.

[12] Refer back to the nursing home story beginning on page 484.

we nevertheless must continue caring for those flowering marvels time without end in order to preserve their ageless beauty and wonder.

In retrospect, whenever I contemplate over all of the troubled and troubling faces that plagued and tormented me for years as they kept me awake every night, an uncomplicated realization has come to me time after time. The only thing ever needed to heal and resolve such unsettling and debilitating visitations was simply to convey my own love upon and within each of those unhappy souls unconditionally.

Only through the compassionate practice of conscious gardening can we initiate an all-embracing *jump* out of duality's weed-ridden quagmires and open ourselves to the limitless, joyful, and unifying possibilities awaiting us in every moment of our existence. A veritable blooming of the blossoms of love forever burst forth paradoxically upon (and out of) the *divine within*, and they surround us and absorb all of us inexorably and irrevocably in their benevolent and enduring embrace.

As I previously mentioned in this chapter, after reciting that initial transformative affirmation before bedtime, "I am victorious in all of my dreams", my sleep no longer was invaded by nightmares. However, for several more years, I still didn't always sleep peacefully. Most nights, I went into either an actual battle or was faced with some sort of metaphorical combat instead. In each case, although I always emerged triumphantly, I also woke up feeling totally spent. After all, who wrestles with Goliath every night and expects to arise in the morning with an enormous boost of energy?

For a few more years, it didn't occur to me how further to modify the straightforward affirmation that I had learned while listening to the radio program about nightmare research. Nevertheless, there was a single dream with the necessary ingredients to spark me into realizing the need for an immediate change in the wording of my nightly affirmation. The odd thing about this particular dream was that its mood and direction soon evolved into feeling more nightmarish than the regular brand of my more-recent dreams where I always would emerge victorious.

However, the general atmosphere of this specific dream undoubtedly resembled any number of previous nightmares I used to experience throughout my childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. But this seemed surprising to me (even while I was actually in the middle of dreaming) because full-fledged nightmares hadn't visited my dream-state for several years. Instead, I was still somewhat badgered by the more recent *victorious conquest-dreams*.

But there was one decisive moment near the end of it where the storyline began to

change in an extraordinary manner. Without any warning, I consciously instructed my dream persona to transform and resolve the ending with forgiveness and love. This had a profound and regenerating effect not only upon the outcome of the dream, but it essentially dissolved all of my previous dread of falling asleep at night. Nothing like this had ever happened before that moment.

Also, it most definitely was the first time for me to experience a form of lucid dreaming. Lucid dreams are when the dreamer is actually aware of the dream while dreaming it from either a participant's or an observer's point of view—or from both. Oftentimes, the experiencer interacts consciously within this state and even can alter the direction of the narrative.

In that first lucid dream of mine, there was an underlying sense of tremendous anxiety and dread. Apparently, I was at home in a very large living room where I happened to be working at the piano. My practice session suddenly was interrupted when I received an unexpected phone call. The person on the other end of the line urgently instructed me to lock up all entries into the house as quickly as possible. Instantly, I heeded this warning by going around the entire place to close and lock every door and window without delay.

As I was securing the front door (including the safety chain attached from the wall over to the door itself), I noticed a black limousine silently creeping up the long and winding driveway. After a short time, the car door could be heard slamming shut. Then there were heavy footsteps approaching the front porch.

I stood paralyzed only a few feet away on the interior side of the locked entry. For a painfully long instant, the stepping sounds ceased. Then, with no warning. the door abruptly burst ajar—although the safety chain was still intact and prevented it from opening wider.

However, within seconds an enormous machete blade whistled through the crack in the door and unrealistically shattered the safety chain into bits. As this barrier no longer could hinder anyone from proceeding further into the house, a very large man dressed in a black tuxedo approached me and instantly thrust his knife into my chest. I immediately collapsed onto the floor. In excruciating pain I looked upward into the intruder's face, expecting him soon to strike again with a death blow.

Instead, I awakened from the dream and my actual eyes flew open. Finding myself still in bed, I began to cry out in despair when a calm and commanding voice spoke out to me:

Go back and finish the dream. You must resolve it now and heal yourself!

Instantly, I closed my eyes again and imagined the situation that I had just escaped. Then without pause, I was sucked back into the bleeding body slumped over and writhing upon the floor.

As I looked upward into the man's cruel eyes, he raised the blade once more, preparing to unleash his final strike upon me. But before he had the opportunity to do so, I spoke out gently and said to him in a calming voice:

I'm sorry for your suffering.

Simultaneously, a golden light burst out of my chest. Instantly all pain and bleeding ceased to exist, and I slowly rose up to meet him face-to-face. The golden light extended to my hands as I reached outward to touch his heart. The moment that my light-filled fingers made contact with him, the machete fell clattering to the floor, he collapsed to his knees, and then he began to wail with lamenting and remorse.

After continually crying out to be forgiven, my frail countenance only could respond by smiling tenderly. All at once, golden light gushed into the air and encompassed the both of us equally in an ecstatic radiance. He smiled back at me while clasping my hand with his, and then squeezed it gently. In that undying instant I opened my eyes once more, awakened from my dream, and quietly wept with perplexing joy.

For the very first time in my life, I emerged from deep somnolence feeling restored and happy. No more would the aftermath of any nightmares fill my waking hours with unsurmountable fatigue and distress. Further symptoms (including migraines and retching) were also eliminated almost completely—although there have been rare occasions when usually milder versions of said symptoms would revisit me over the years.

This dream could be considered my final victory dream. Indeed, I truly was victorious. Perhaps, it was also an ultimate dream of accepting the triumphal power of love within each of us. It transformed a quasi-nightmarish situation into a miraculous alternative—one which was generated consciously while I actively participated in its cathartic conclusion.

One mindful act of forgiveness turned out to be all that was needed to transcend and expel that potentially horrific ending—one which was ripe with the likelihood of reactivating more chronic terrors into every possible dream in the future. Instead, upon the wings of compassion and forgiveness, a wondrous renewal released me entirely from all potential nightmares.

While considering the import of such a dream during the following afternoon, it suddenly occurred to me that I no longer wanted or needed my dreams simply to be *victorious* and this inspired me to create a totally new affirmation to take its place. This image of being victorious nonetheless reminded me of many paintings and sculptures that I had seen over the years portraying the victorious image of Guanyin (Kwan Yin), the ancient Chinese embodiment of compassion. Jesuit missionary priests recognized in her the same blessed attributes imbuing the holy Mother Mary in Christianity.

Though, unlike Mary, Guanyin was often portrayed as a triumphant female warrior holding a great sword. I often thought this to be such an antithetical representation of love (and for years, I couldn't see how any semblance could be made between her and Mother Mary). That is to say, I could see no parallels between the two of them until I fully understood the symbolism of her sword. She was said to vanquish the entire world with her blade of compassion.

Despite this image of Guanyin flowing through my mind, I still found it necessary to readjust my bedtime affirmations about dreaming something other than being simply victorious. In contrast, I then decided to fashion a statement that would materialize a dream state forever filling me exclusively with peace and joy and love.

VI.

Thought-induced revisions to reality...

It is said that when Spaniards first arrived in the Americas, Caribbean natives initially couldn't see the large European vessels anchored off of their West Indian coastline. They literally were *blind* to an actuality in which they had no practice experiencing nor believing.

From a researcher's perspective, Dr. Candace Pert further elaborates on this dualistic conundrum of our ability to manifest what we choose to believe or disbelieve in her book

Molecules of Emotion: The Science Behind Mind-Body Medicine. The following excerpt is taken from a section entitled, "Creating our own Reality, Realizing our own Expectations":

> There is no objective reality! In order for the brain not to be overwhelmed by the constant deluge of sensory input, some sort of filtering system must enable us to pay attention to what our bodymind deems the most important pieces of information and to ignore the others….
>
> Emotions are constantly regulating what we experience as "reality." The decision about what sensory information travels to your brain and what gets filtered out depends on what signals the receptors[13] are receiving from the peptides.[14] There is a plethora of elegant neurophysiological data suggesting that the nervous system is not capable of taking in everything, but can only scan the outer world for material that it is prepared to find by virtue of its wiring hookups, its own internal patterns, and its past experience. The *superior colliculus* in the midbrain, another nodal point of neuropeptide[15] receptors,

---

[13] According to Candace Pert PhD, a receptor is:

> …a molecule, typically a protein or group of proteins, anchored in the outer cell membrane with a site accessible to the outside environment that binds with ligands such as hormones, antigens, drugs, peptides, or neurotransmitters—all those ligands I have been referring to as "informational substances." The receptor is the key player in the communication network of the bodymind, as it is only when the receptor is occupied by the ligand that the information encoded in the informational substances can be received. It is also at the receptor that the earliest informational processing occurs, as the actual signal the receptor transduces to the cell can be modulated by the action of other receptors and their ligands, the physiology of the cell, and even past events and memories of them.

Also, Dr. Pert defines a *ligand* as follows:

> …from the Latin *ligare*, "that which binds" (same root as religion). Any of a variety of small molecules that specifically bind to a cellular receptor and in so doing convey an informational message to the cell.

[14] According to Pert, a peptide is:

> …any of various natural or synthetic compounds containing two or more amino acids linked by the carboxyl group of one amino acid and the amino group of another. By definition, polypeptides are the larger peptides, usually those with in excess of 100 amino acids. But they are smaller than the proteins, which may have 200 or more amino acids as well as other attached molecules, such as sugars or lipids.

[15] Also according to Pert, a neuropeptide is:

> …any of the nearly 100 small peptide informational substances initially described as neuronal secretions. More recent observations that lymphocytes and monocytes both secrete and respond to neuropeptides has, of course, rendered this term somewhat inaccurate, and immunologists favor terms like cytokine or chemokine, but neuroscientists still commonly refer to neuropeptides.

She describes lymphocytes thusly:

> Cells formed in lymphoid tissue, such as the lymph nodes, spleen, thymus, and bone marrow, constitute between 22 and 28 percent of all white blood cells in the blood of a normal adult human being. They function in the development of immunity and include two specific types, B cells and T cells….

> controls the muscles that direct the eyeball, and affects which images are permitted to fall on the retina and hence to be seen. For example, when the tall European ships first approached the early Native Americans, it was such an "impossible" vision in their reality that their highly filtered perceptions couldn't register what was happening, and they literally failed to "see" the ships.

This might suggest that even our actual bodies and brains have evolved to accommodate, manifest, and proliferate each societal and individually practiced duality within every thought, belief, and action. Consequently, we continue the process of *teaching* these illusions to everyone and everything around us. In other words, sowing seeds of dualistic weeds are accomplished partially by setting a mental, emotional, and physical precedent for ourselves and for others to replicate and reinforce.

The Caribbean natives created their reality through the limited, dichotomous thoughts that they had learned while employing well-practiced beliefs for untold generations, just as those Spanish explorers brought their own duplicities with them into the New World. But in our own culture today, we are no less guilty of doing exactly the same thing, except that we also have perhaps inherited some of their practices as well—most likely strengthening, complicating, diversifying, and amalgamating those earlier duplicities with our own.

This being said, when the natives eventually could *visually grasp* the idea of great Spanish boats anchored just beyond their shoreline, after always believing that nothing so large could float upon the ocean's vast surface, what ultimately came to be their emotion-induced and thought-generated reality and where were the actual illusions in all of this? Were those ships' former state of invisibility a veritable condition of nonexistence for the natives?

On the other hand, was it just a mentally-concocted cloaking mechanism manufactured by previously practiced thought and an emotionalized belief in their own disbelief? Additionally, did this dualistic reality of theirs simply shift to accommodate those modifications in their thinking and the subsequent adjustments in their abilities to perceive outwardly more

---

Also, Pert defines a monocyte/macrophage as:

> ...an immune system cell formed from a bone marrow precursor that circulates in the blood for several days before migrating into tissues throughout the body, including the brain, whereupon it matures and differentiates (that is, acquires additional functions and abilities to cause immunity) into a macrophage or microglial cell. Controlled by chemotactic peptide informational molecules, macrophages are among the cells that respond rapidly (in hours or days, rather than weeks) to trauma, injury, and infections. They play prominent roles in wound repair and healing, ingesting and digesting debris (dead cells). But by themselves they do not have the capacity to recognize specific pathogens. This is a key feature that distinguishes them from lymphocytes.

possibilities of dualistic thought?

These questions can be posed justly while speculating about each society throughout history or about every individual who has tread upon the distances spread across space and time. Obviously, this includes when we consider ourselves as we are in the present moment and how we perceive the civilization in which we all live today. When are any of us truly realizing genuine experience and when is it that we merely are fantasizing through the devises of more contrived illusions? In either case, aren't these instances still nothing other than perpetuating duality by reproducing more of the same separations and delineations through each personal and collective practice stemming from dualistic thought?

According to some, many of the things that we might perceive without the use of at least one of our five bodily senses[16] are lumped together and labeled generally and often unscientifically as *hallucinations*. We are willing to accept the possibilities of multiple dimensions, parallel universes, and alternate realities, yet most of us are equally unwilling to acknowledge the possibility that we already have more than occasional access to those other distinctive realms whether we believe it or not. Additionally, subtle and often unrecognizable senses that we do not practice using regularly may nevertheless have acted as constant gateways to these various worlds since time immemorial.

What we perceive in our dreams could be nothing more than glimpses into alternate realities, some being nearly identical to the life occurrences through which we consciously are living now, and others that are radically different from what appear to be our day-to-day happenings. When we look out over any geographical panorama and suddenly notice intangible visions of people, places, and events superimposed upon what we always have assumed to be the sole actuality of our lives, are these simply hallucinations caused by mental aberrations or sensory deprivation, or are they in fact windows into other universes and realities that we hitherto practiced disbelieving in or unwittingly ignored? Moreover, could they simply be our own archetypical sailing vessels anchored upon a perceptual shoreline of belief, awaiting the moment when a grand modification in past beliefs allows us finally to recognize them as being real?

Such precipitous shifts in awareness assuredly are similar to those experienced by the island natives when they first became cognizant of the European vessels looming just beyond the furthermost boundaries of their island habitat. They ultimately could see that which long

[16] Sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell.

had remained imperceptible to them. Formerly, those enigmatic sailing ships floated feasibly upon an adjoining, vast void of the unconscious unknown.

VII.

Developing senses beyond sight and sound for those who are blind or deaf...

There may possibly be certain individuals who have reservations about aspects of my previously-mentioned personal stories. What actually would such a person deem to be valid and real in each instance and what would be considered as being mere fantasy, fallacy, or some other sort of illusory deviation? I presume that those particular people most likely will react to said accounts with at least a certain amount of personal bias, no matter how logical, impartial, or scientifically minded they consider themselves to be.

We often tend to judge the boundaries of all possibilities with that which we personally have experienced as (and practiced believing to be) real or viable. We also gage the alleged experiences of others as being either factual or fallacious by whether or not those encounters tend to match up and correspond with our own. Additionally, our biases and prejudices tend to be greatly influenced by which of our dreams have been fulfilled, and which of them have been thwarted or destroyed.

Regarding that particular account describing the BBC radio broadcast from decades past, rather than trying to vindicate my assertions as being accurate to those who would choose to suspect their validity, I instead prefer to ponder whether the unexpected transmission *visiting* us might be nothing other than a brief indication of some latent sensory apparatus awakening within both my wife and me, even if only for a short period of time. We often take for granted when a variety of animals see, hear, smell, feel, navigate, intuit, and sense in other ways far beyond what the average human normally is capable of perceiving. We would take it as an

absurdity if someone declared these acute animal perceptions to be nothing more than a canine *hallucination*, feline *fantasy*, or beehive *psychosis*.

However, in today's human society, any of its members who develop perceptions beyond what is now considered the norm is often treated with suspicion or outright condemnation. But we frequently forget that deaf and blind people readily develop alternate senses to compensate for what many would label (with both callousness and ignorance) as their *shortcomings*.

Moreover, they often foster added unorthodox sensitivities as well. This simply occurs because such individuals are forced to seek new ways of practicing how to pilot through their lives. Likewise, as they discover those unique modes of circumnavigating the obstacles caused by loss of sight, hearing, or speech, unique sensory attributes regularly ensue. They quickly replace those that were lost. Such recently acquired abilities magically transform into functioning sensorial perceptions in their own right.

Nearing the end of my stay at music school in Baltimore, I became good friends with a blind pianist. Although many other students joked around with him in groups, I noticed that virtually none of those so-called friends spent much time with him one-on-one. Yet, during his leisure hours, he normally spent a good deal of time surrounded by at least a half-dozen of those same pals. Needless to say, there was never a single moment when I could speak with him alone about anything serious or meaningful.

However, one Friday evening we both were exiting the practice rooms at midnight when I happened to run into him in the hallway. After we began talking, I mentioned my plan to leave town the following day by taking a local bus out to the end of that particular line. There was supposed to be a very beautiful park in those outlying neighborhoods and I wanted to explore its highly celebrated gardens.

The moment that I mentioned this to him his face lit up with excitement. Seeing how happy he suddenly had become, I immediately asked if he would like to go with me. Without hesitation, he replied enthusiastically with an enormous grin and a series of emphatic nods.

Because we both enjoyed the initial outing so much, it was decided that he would accompany me there on somewhat of a regular basis. But soon thereafter, I unfortunately had to leave the school permanently due to ongoing illness. However, when we first arrived at the park amid a wide array of flower gardens, he surprisingly zoomed out ahead of me with almost palpable excitement.

At first, I was apprehensive about letting him do this alone but soon discovered that he

could manage exceptionally well without any assistance. It was fascinating for me to watch him assess his surroundings with an endless volley of taps and slides in every direction from his walking stick. Although he seemed to be perfectly capable of continuing by himself, he instead came to a halt and turned his head back towards me with a beckoning gesture. Once I caught up to where he was standing, he lifted up his arm signaling me to give him my own arm. He immediately took hold of it for support and guidance as we continued our pleasant stroll through the park side-by-side.

It didn't take long before he started opening up by speaking confidentially to me about being the only blind pianist enrolled in our small and competitive music school. He further expressed many related hopes and fears. This is something he confessed having never admitted to anyone else. In turn, I also confided in him concerning my own aspirations and apprehensions.

As our friendship began to solidify on that single afternoon, I asked him if he would like me to describe the flowers for him. With glistening eyes, he mouthed the word *yes* in a nearly mute whisper. I instantly realized how much this meant to him when he squeezed my arm tightly with a quivering hand as he was answering my question in the affirmative.

Once I started painting a verbal portrait of each blossom in detail, I unexpectedly had an inkling to guide his hand across those petals while describing them to him successively. This thrilled him so much that his smile shone brightly while tears trickled down both cheeks. The more deeply we delved into the individual details of petal size, shape, texture, and color, a startling transformation eventually took place.

As soon as I placed his hand upon the next bloom, he suddenly could tell me its color. Although he never seemed to be able to detect different hues or multi-colored blossoms, he very accurately could announce the predominant and basic shade of each flower. This sudden shift astounded me so I immediately asked him how he was able to do it. After a brief and thoughtful silence he replied:

I'm not sure but I think it's like I almost can feel the colors. Do you know what I mean?

But in all frankness the only answer that I could muster was a completely bewildered *No*.

Nonetheless, when I asked him to explain further, he enthusiastically described how touching each flower somehow created an *image* in his mind—which he knew (one way or another) to be a specific color. Apparently, this wasn't a totally new experience for him. He said

that he could recognize the colors of other objects for quite some time, but he never before had someone else with whom he could discuss and verify his impressions.

Actually, there was another blind fellow who lived a couple of doors away from my dorm room while I was first studying at that school. However, he did not study piano at the college level. He instead was enrolled in the adjoining high school preparatory division. Although he was more than a year older than I was, his extreme disabilities prevented him from being admitted to any of the college degree programs.

Aside from being blind since birth, he also had the extreme disadvantage of being legally deaf. I often wondered how someone who could barely hear anything would choose to study music so seriously—a pursuit normally requiring an extraordinarily high dependence on hearing sound in explicit detail. At least, this is what I had always believed until I made the acquaintance of this exceptional individual.

Although I frequently greeted him in the dormitory hallways, he never responded. For many months I simply thought that he was either extremely shy or had no interest in making friends. It wasn't until I overheard a couple of teachers expressing their concern for his deafness that I started to rethink how I might approach him in the future.

When I next met up with him in the dormitory, it conveniently happened to be as we were both entering the elevator. This proved to be fortunate as he was unable to whisk by me while proceeding down one of many corridors as he normally did. Instead, while we were descending to the ground floor, I stood very close to him, gently patted him on the arm, and leaned close to his ear. I then almost shouted out his name and greeted him amicably.

He instantly smiled in return and then introduced himself without any further provocation from me. It was at that moment when I realized how poorly he could actually hear. This further piqued my curiosity about why he spent most of each afternoon and evening practicing the piano.

For the next several weeks, I was able to stop him in the hall successfully by tapping him on the shoulder. There still were times when he seemed to sense my presence and would turn to greet me—even before I was able to nudge him in my usual fashion. While this soon was becoming our habitual way of meeting up with each other, he suddenly felt comfortable enough to open up to me. Soon thereafter he began speaking more freely about the details of his life.

It was at this point when he asked if I would like to hear him play some Chopin that he was currently studying. I naturally said that it would be my pleasure. So we went over to the

preparatory school where most of the practice studios were located. Fortunately, we were able to find a vacant room with a reasonably good instrument therein.

As he situated himself before the keyboard, I found myself captivated by how he used his fingers almost like a set of living, vibrating antennae. Before he ever created a single sound, he sat silently for several long moments. While leaning forward, he waved his hands mildly above the keys. It seemed as though he were searching for his starting point without ever touching a single note.

Suddenly, he plunged his hands down upon the keys thunderously and began the rigorous "Revolutionary Étude". Although there were times when his playing became rhythmically erratic and a couple of the climaxes tended to be tonally harsh and strident, the rest of his performance was truly beautiful—being both fiery and sensitive.

I later realized that many of the inconsistencies in his impromptu recital may have been due simply to nervousness about playing for me. Apparently he almost never shared his musical abilities with anyone other than his teacher, and he only played for her once each week during their hourly lessons together. So I did feel honored that my newfound friend felt confident enough to share this obviously important part of his daily life with someone with whom he had met only recently.

After we had become better acquainted, I finally was able to inquire about a question that had been taunting me for a long time. How was he able to shape musical phrases so expressively when he barely could hear the actual sounds being produced from the instrument? His response to my query I found to be quite intriguing. Although he couldn't hear with his ears as most other people do, he described his alternative method of *listening* was more of an ability to *feel* sounds in an exceedingly visceral manner.

Because neither of my blind pianist friends were able to use normal eyesight to aim visually while their fingers traversed the keyboard, they each developed unconventional perceptions that compensated for their lack of *ordinary seeing*. Additionally, written music had to be studied in braille[17] and memorized before they could even begin to play.

This is because such reading skills require the use of both hands feeling written *bumps* on the page that designate the appropriate musical notation. Therefore, it should be obvious that the actual playing of the piano can never occur while reading in this manner. So, a very

[17] According to *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary*, braille is:

> ...a system of writing for the blind that uses characters made up of raised dots.

sharp and accurate memory is required just to begin playing any instrument from written music and has to be constantly developed further, implemented, and refined.

Both of these exceptional fellows fostered uncanny abilities that normally sighted and hearing individuals fail to develop. Although there were no visible sensory organs performing these remarkable perceptual feats, something was definitely assisting their *alternative-facilities* in manifesting nevertheless; and as each of my friends practiced utilizing these *invisible* senses, their unique capabilities continually increased—equally in acuity, accuracy, and sensitivity.

VIII.

An amazing display of mind over matter...

At this point, it would be appropriate to include a story about one other music student who I met at school in Baltimore. He was an incredible violinist who came from Korea and soon became one of my closest friends while living in Maryland. I loved when we occasionally could find the time to play music together because his musicianship truly inspired me and gave me great joy.

He was a very quiet and humble person despite his exceptional aptitude for performance. After knowing him for several months, a rumor flew around the school that he was an expert in martial arts. A gregarious classmate of mine once dove into the dormitory elevator while my violinist friend already was inside waiting for the door to close. Once he leapt inside, my classmate lifted his leg high in the air and pushed the button on the control panel to close the door. This he did gracefully with the toe of his shoe.

Knowing that the violinist came from eastern Asia, he then made some Bruce-Lee-style karate sounds generated from the back of his throat and took a playful attack stance to get a reaction out of his elevator companion from Seoul.

However, these mock martial-arts *moves* yielded an unexpected result. Instead of joining

in with this spirited jest, my friend immediately put his violin case down in the corner and took a very serious defensive posture. He actually was getting prepared to fight back.

It was at this moment when the other fellow realized that his joke no longer resembled anything amusing. Instantly, he began to smile and apologized for the misunderstanding. Once he admitted to his horseplay, both of them relaxed and began to chat amicably.

Apparently, ever since the Korean War, families in South Korea lived in constant fear of an invasion from the North. Consequently, many parents enrolled even their youngest children in martial arts classes so they knew how to defend themselves. It was at this juncture when my violinist friend admitted that he had a black belt in karate and one of the highest rankings in jujitsu as well; and it was soon after this encounter when the rumor of his being somewhat of a master in martial arts spread like wildfire around the school.

Many of the other students constantly begged him to give them a karate demonstration. They often tried to goad him into showing off some of his *moves* by daring him to punch through the cinder-block walls in the dormitory. Other various teasing tactics were employed but he always responded by smiling politely. He then would shake his head to indicate an unwillingness to comply with their taunts. Then, he quietly would go about his business.

There was a particular evening when the entire dormitory was totally vacant. Nearly all of the students were attending some special event in another building. However, I selected to practice instead. When I was returning to my room, I found that my Korean friend also had just finished his practicing.

As we entered the lobby in the dormitory, he stopped abruptly and turned in my direction. With an enthusiastic smile he asked me if I would like to see him break through a large stack of thick, wooden pieces using a karate technique. I was completely taken aback by such an unexpected offer. But naturally I responded with an eager nod.

His practice in martial arts was never a subject brought up by either of us before then. But since he suddenly seemed willing to share this part of his life with me, I felt it was permissible for me to inquire further about a subject with which I had no familiarity at all. My first question was one which would be considered obvious for any musician to ask:

Haven't you ever been worried about injuring your hands or breaking your fingers?

He cheerfully told me about the premise adhered to by serious practitioners of martial arts. He described a principle that science only has begun to acknowledge in recent years.

Despite this, it has been known by those who have mastered karate and jujitsu for centuries. Although I obviously cannot remember his explanation verbatim (especially after several decades having passed us by since he spoke to me about this subject), the gist of his remarks went something like this:

> The solidness of all matter is an illusion. Atoms are comprised mostly of empty space. So it is the task of anyone planning on breaking through what most people consider to be an unbreakable object to *see* its emptiness before attempting to penetrate through it.
>
> This is done by preparing a clear and unobstructed pathway. If a visualized *tunnel* is not perceived fully prior to crashing down upon anything deemed to be made of solid matter, then the person endeavoring to accomplish such a feat will wind up with a shattered hand or a broken arm instead of splitting in half the targeted object.[18]

As he was explaining the process to me in great detail, it reminded me of how so many people take offense and strongly object to when so-called *solid matter* and our material world in general are referred to as illusions. On an earlier occasion, when several acquaintances and I were discussing how the material universe might actually be an artifice of the mind, one individual angrily pointed at a nearby house, a bolder, and a tree while defiantly yelling out to the rest of us:

> Are these illusions? I don't think so. They are solid and very real. At least, in my world they are!

And then—so as to prove his point further—he raised his arm, tightened his fist, and punched the tree again and again. Finally, he turned and looked back at the rest of our group with a satisfied glare of triumph, even while showing off the red marks appearing across his soon-to-be extremely bruised knuckles.

Nevertheless, I still couldn't help wondering about my violinist friend's assertion possibly painting a much more credible picture about what is actually real and what is not. Then, I also mused how his remarkable timber-splitting stunt must be somehow akin to other incredible

[18] In Joseph Selbie's *The Physics of God*, the author explains this cryptic and enormous emptiness by recounting one way he had heard it described previously:

> You've probably heard this old chestnut before, but it's worth repeating: If all the space between the nucleus of the atoms and their orbiting electrons were removed, our bodies would be reduced to less than the size of a pinhead. Our bodies consist nearly entirely of empty space—as in 99.9999 percent empty space.

feats defying our well-practiced beliefs about illusion, reality, and the presupposed, immutable *laws of the universe*.

These might include walking across hot coals with bare feet while never being burned in the slightest, meditative routines (such as levitating) often proclaimed as being impossible—even after being verified by baffled researchers observing from the sidelines. Then, there are those occasional victims falling out of airplanes from tens-of-thousands of feet above who suffer only varying degrees of temporary injuries (although most people would have been completely pulverized by such devastating impacts—hitting the ground from implausible heights). And finally, it is worth considering those freakish instances when individuals are directly struck by lightning and walk away from their point of contact virtually unscathed. Or in other cases, they eventually recover fully (or partially) from such an otherwise seemingly un-survivable event.

After my friend and I finished our intriguing conversation about the philosophical side of karate, he immediately began to prepare himself physically and mentally before demonstrating to me something that never occurred to me as being a possibility before. Albeit, his height was considerably shorter than mine, he did have a solid and well-muscled physique (though not quite as bulky as that of a collegiate wrestler or competitive bodybuilder), he quietly turned to face a stack of thick pieces of hardwood that stood between two and three feet high.

Instantly, he became inordinately still—even surpassing his normally serene countenance—and then without warning, he started breathing in an indescribably intense and almost savage manner. His face was transformed into a reddish globe of leonine ferocity, which nearly frightened the wits right out of me. In all the time that I knew him did I ever imagine his being able to convey a demeanor of such unexpected focus and power.

Finally, he rose an arm high above his head and thrust it downward through the dense objects in a nearly blinding flash. Each wooden block instantaneously split and then splintered onto the ground with an enormous crash. As the demolished aftermath lay in a heap directly in front of me, I stood speechless for many seconds thereafter.

Once I was able to regain some semblance of composure, I sighed in relief and thanked him for showing me this amazing, personal part of himself. Afterwards, I asked him if he felt any pain. In reply, he chuckled unobtrusively while showing me his hand.

It looked perfectly normal. There was no swelling and certainly no cuts or abrasions of any kind were present either. After wiggling his fingers playfully in my direction, we cleaned up all of the broken pieces and happily went to the cafeteria for a snack. Once there, my friend

presented me with a large box of edible treats. I opened it and we both dove into some of the wonderful homemade buns, rice cakes, and sweets that his mother had just sent to him from Korea.

IX.

Curative quests ending night-blindness...

Within each of the stories told in the previous chapter sections VII and VIII, unconventional sensory perceptions were discovered, practiced, developed, and possibly even perfected by these three musical friends of mine. Being able to identify colors without the normal ability to see them, to hear music by *feeling* their vibrations, and to detect and pass through the empty space in solid matter (without the aid of any tool or technological gadget) are just a miniscule sampling of the types of abilities that can be realized without the aid of what we consider to be the normal functions of our five physical senses.

Clearly, these do not include other capabilities possibly deemed as being the intuitive faculties. In modern civilization, we frequently have developed mechanical and electronic devices that have improved human functionalities in many ways. But frequently, those types of machines also allow us inadvertently to abandon other abilities we may have never realized, used , or even considered what their vital roles were while benefitting earlier generations.

For instance, the electric light bulb certainly has enabled our day vision to be active all through the night if we so desire it. But most people in our *well-lit* societies have lost any semblance of *night-sight* whatsoever. Being someone who regularly spent time out-of-doors in total darkness, especially as a young man, I discovered a simple way to develop and maintain this unique form of vision. It proved for me a far more effective sensory mechanism than most people in our urbanized culture would have found it to be. This was (and still is) due to the fact that the majority of our species remain constantly exposed to a wide variety of artificial lights—

those to which we subject ourselves willingly on a daily basis.

While leading dozens of people through densely canopied forests during moonless nights (without the aid of flashlights), family members, friends, students, and acquaintances often were bewildered by my ability to see in what they deemed to be total darkness. Such individuals erroneously labeled my adequately developed sensory skill as an exceptional gift or talent that remained unavailable to most other humans. This however is a gross misconception and clearly doesn't demonstrate a true understanding of how we must practice any sort of perception in order for it to function noticeably and reliably.

In my youth and early childhood, I spent nearly every night of my life in an artificially lit environment—not unlike most other people of my generation, or those born into subsequent generations. Consequently, the ability to *see* in the dark was simply impossible for me to imagine at the time. But after moving to the White Mountains in New Hampshire during my early twenties, I decided to confront a well-ingrained, lifelong fear of the dark by taking nightly strolls outside.

I first began this self-imposed challenge by walking on open roadways at times when the moon was relatively full. I also kept a flashlight in my pocket *in case of emergency*, though I maintained a firm resolve never to use it. After all, the moonlight acted like training wheels[19] as I began to explore the possibilities of fostering actual night vision.

But while a definite familiarity with this pursuit increased through regular practice, I started testing myself further by walking in the wee hours when it was rainy, cloudy, or at times when the sky was totally moonless. Consequently, this sort of conditioning gradually reduced my need for any more dependence upon the moon to help light up my path.

After a few months of assimilating my eyes in this manner, I then felt confident to test my capabilities even further. Future walks were diverted from the dirt-and-gravel country lanes onto rough, narrow paths winding through dense forestlands nearby. It was in these virtually lightless domains where even the brightest moon found it difficult to infiltrate.

As I mentioned earlier, I used these post-crepuscular escapades as a way to overcome my fear of the dark. Having suffered through more than two decades of chronic nightmares, I undoubtedly generated this common fear (at least partially) from an uncommon source: my perpetual struggle with horrific dreams during those endless nighttime hours.

---

[19] According to *Merriam-Webster's*, training wheels are:

> …a pair of small wheels connected to the rear axle of a bicycle to help a beginning bicyclist maintain balance.

Additionally, my parents also added to the problem unintentionally. They genuinely seemed to be amused by frightening their young children in the dark. More likely than not, they acquired this habit by imitating what their own parents and older siblings did to them when they were young.

It also seemed that they followed a tradition upheld by many adults of the human species (even from time immemorial) by telling their youngest kids scary stories before bedtime. Although most youngsters enjoy this stimulating ritual before getting tucked into bed, frightening tales obviously were not the most effective inducement for preventing my own terrifying dreams from recurring. This presumably is true for anyone else suffering from the same or similar disorder.

As my desire to neutralize any residual fears of being alone in the dark became more apparent to me, I realized that all of my assorted dreads were well-practiced reactions—at least, partially—to those unconscious pranks of my parents from years past; and those terrors most emphatically needed to be removed from my psyche. Therefore, I persevered with a personal quest for wandering regularly into wilderness country, especially after each pervasive stream of daylight already had vanished from the horizon. However, the greatest dare with which I confronted myself was yet to come.

There was a trailhead at the base of Piermont Mountain. It happened to be only a half-mile away from my front doorstep, so the most challenging plan that I could devise for myself at the time was to venture up a somewhat steep and winding footpath to the summit without flashlight or headlamp. Because it also happened to be a very narrow route and not well-traveled, the trail often seemed to disappear in unexpected places along the way. Therefore, it was necessary to familiarize myself with the track countless times during daylight hours before venturing up to the peak after dark. Besides, even during my afternoon walks along this poorly marked trail, there were many instances when it was necessary to stop and check in which direction the path was actually going.

One evening just after dusk, I was determined to practice utilizing this alternate means of sight. It was truly unnerving to venture out-of-doors with no lantern lighting the way ahead of me. To wander about so far from the house through an unrecognizable domain of indiscernible shadows (and an ultimate *blindness*) certainly didn't come easily. Oftentimes, it took a great deal of effort to convince myself to proceed with my plan. Opening the front door to stare into pitch blackness understandably had a dampening effect upon my resolve to follow

through with the challenges I assigned myself that night.

In those early days of attempting such a radical exercise, it often took up to thirty minutes or so for my eyes to begin distinguishing the largest objects immediately in front of me. Yet, once I had grown accustomed to the routine, there came a time when I could see mostly everything in close proximity and even the silhouettes of larger objects further away. Actually, it didn't take long before I discovered that my body appeared to exude outwardly an almost indistinguishable lambency. This delicate glow aided in discerning the details of terrain immediately before me. Such subtle light emissions turned out to be a vital component for navigating this mysterious and mystical realm no longer visited by the vast majority of our human race.

When thinking back to those early days when I was consciously attempting to overcome my fear of the dark and then stumbled upon my seeming ability to generate light from within, the situation reminded me of the compassionate, mysterious, and multi-layered words attributed to one of my favorite poets—the fourteenth-century visionary Hafiz:

I wish I could show you,
When you are lonely or in darkness,
The astonishing light of your own being.

Aside from discovering this seemingly self-generating luminescence within myself, the entire air around me—even at substantial distances, and in every direction—began to exude an incalculable number of sparkling specks of light. Yet, over time those bright dots often would merge together into a single radiance capable of illuminating much of the entire landscape. This could happen whether I was encircled by wide-open vistas or confined within dense canopies of forestland. It made no difference. Although I was familiar with similar types of illumination from my considerable meditation practices indoors, these radiances out in the open air began to have a new and more profound meaning altogether.

In the confines of a room during an intense meditational *sitting session*, this type of *glow* seemed to be simply a fascinating result of the meditational process that often led to invaluable realizations—often appearing first as unexpected visions. But once activated under the night sky, a more seemingly practical use emerged almost instantly. There were countless occasions when such *illuminations* kept me on the trail, prevented me from falling off of high ledges, and warned me of sizeable rocks and logs that I otherwise would have tripped over inadvertently;

and more importantly, I was able to guide many other people to do the same.

Decades after making those first solo attempts up Piermont Mountain in the dead of night, I was again reminded of my entry into that hidden world while watching the fantasy adventure film *Avatar* in 2009 for the first time.[20] Most of that story took place on a distant, inhospitable moon (requiring nearly six years to travel there from earth), and many scenes portray this treacherous yet exotic world after dark. It was during those nocturnal segments that I was reminded of how I initially started developing my own night vision and suddenly began to perceive the world from a completely altered perspective. As soon as I relinquished all use of my flashlight, I was able to pass through the invisible divide between our accepted notions of darkness and a wondrous, enigmatic, and entirely uncharted perception—one which holds a lush and vibrant realm only accessible when we give up our flashlights, bonfires, electric lightbulbs, and neon lamps.

Similarly, the flame from the main character's torch is extinguished after he had been separated from the other members of his research team. But much to his amazement, he discovers that once his torch's limited (and apparently limiting) glow has been snuffed out, the entire wilderness comes alive in a kaleidoscopic rainbow of color and light. Every plant and all living creatures seem to generate their own radiance from within.

Certainly my own encounters never included a nocturnal landscape in such dazzling *technicolor*. Moreover, no creature in our world that I have met after dark ever glowed so brightly as was portrayed in the movie. Everything instead seemed to be enveloped in various gradations of silvery greys, milky whites, or crystalline and translucent hues of each (occasionally revealing faint shades of blues, greens, reds, and purples—and on rare occasions, even pinks, oranges, and the more soft and subtle hues found within this subdued nocturnal rainbow).

But what I did find in that movie to be reminiscent of my own experiences here on earth (commencing decades earlier) was how the main character couldn't see hardly anything around him until he no longer had any artificial light source to rely upon, which instead dampened his abilities to truly *see in the dark*. It was only then that an obscured terrain suddenly lit up to reveal a totally different universe than to which he was normally accustomed.

[20] The science fiction film *Avatar* was first released in December 2009. Written, directed, and produced by James Cameron, the cast included Sam Worthington, Zoe Saldana, Stephen Lang, Michelle Rodriguez, and Sigourney Weaver. It was nominated for nine Academy Awards (including Best Director and Best Picture) and won three awards for Best Art Direction, Best Cinematography, and Best Visual Effects.

Long after I first started developing my own skills of *night-sightedness*, from time to time I came across several accounts describing the various experiences of aboriginal trackers, native hunters, and many others who spent much time traversing wilderness regions in the wee hours without the aid of any artificial illumination. There was one thing in particular that several of them pointed out insistently. It was the ability to see through their blackened surroundings with the assistance from soft, glowing beams of light. In many of those instances, this light seemed to be emanating from their own bodies. Apparently, I wasn't the only one who actually could detect a faint shadow on the ground caused by gentle glimmers radiating out and away from myself.

As I initially discovered this subtle light projecting from my own physical form, I thought that it might be merely some sort of mental illusion. However, its authenticity soon was corroborated by that reclusive, old medicine man, Little Wolf, who I spoke of earlier. In fact, it was he who first brought up the subject about such a light actually existing in all people. He explained that it was a part of our eternal and indestructible spirit. He continued by telling me about how his ancestors became familiar with this light and how it allowed them to travel across great wilderness areas during the darkest hours of night.

When friends and family started requesting to come with me on some of my nightly pilgrimages, they were enthralled when I provided them with a few simple techniques whereby many of them could actually begin to *see* almost immediately. However, it is important to emphasize that their freshly awakened *night-sight* was weak, sporadic, unpredictable, and oftentimes fatiguing. Consequently, they were unable to sustain the light for more than a few moments—or a couple of minutes at best.

Like any other human function (mental or physical), this particular sensory skill requires constant practice in order to realize some semblance of reliability and usefulness. Everyone also should keep in mind that like with all other human perceptions, some individuals develop and maintain keener sensory acuity and more proclivities towards relevant sensitivities than others do.[21]

---

[21] It is important to emphasize here that learning to hike after dark should be undertaken only in a very serious manner and only by those in excellent physical condition. Also, it is recommended never to attempt such a feat unassisted—especially in the beginning, and also when a person hasn't had the opportunity of hiking several times weekly for years beforehand.

Despite having just recounted my solo treks walking barefoot after the sun had gone down, it is essential for me to also mention here that I had been walking *shoeless* regularly ever since I was a child. Consequently, my feet had been really toughened up before ever attempting to hike up rugged mountain paths in the middle of the night in this manner.

Normally, after completing their first attempt with unilluminated hikes into late-night darkness, these people often discovered a reconnection, a vague remembrance, or some other form of inexplicable familiarity found within this neglected, otherwise-impermeable realm. Afterwards, they often shared their experiences with others they knew. Occasionally, it was reported back to me that although most of their friends received such recounts with amazement and enthusiasm, there were sometimes those who reacted more skeptically.

Certain naysayers often suggested that anything perceived as so-called *seeing in darkness*—especially when it came to the radiant beams emanating from various individuals or particular objects—had to be either a trick of the mind or an outright hallucination. But there is no mental illusion that can guide countless people safely through challenging and sometimes hazardous obstacles in utter blackness. Indeed, neither can hallucinations give anyone the proper sensory input to identify objects accurately whenever they happen to occur in this manner.

Besides, using this sort of logic (or illogic), we would have to conclude that an infinite number of keen-sighted nocturnal species must navigate darkness simply by *hallucinating* every moment of their nightly existence. It is true that they often use other senses such as highly developed hearing and smell to assist in the work of their eyes. Nevertheless, many of them still have ample night vision as well.

Regardless, if mental trickery truly beguiled me into believing in those soft, illuminating rays manifesting (whenever I found myself where there was a relative absence of light), then I led countless individuals carefully back to numerous trailheads simply by *fantasizing* safe routes through the blackest of midnights; and this was an endeavor that I successfully fulfilled for decades—traversing hundreds or possibly thousands of miles in the process. In addition, I ran to the rescue of numerous folks who were stranded on certain mountain peaks after dark and even brought one seriously injured hiker down from a perilous ledge—subsequently driving her to a hospital emergency room immediately thereafter. How can any such enterprises be successfully undertaken merely by hallucinating a lightened track through otherwise impenetrable darkness for hours at a time?

As these unique nighttime activities became second nature to me, I found traveling without a flashlight incredibly uplifting and edifying as well. Not only did I learn how to walk in lightlessness unafraid, but every moment brought unexpected revelations for functioning with empathy and happiness during the rest of my waking hours.

Dualities that normally manifested as the real and unreal, certain and uncertain, possible and impossible readily merged into one blissful and transcendent joining. I suddenly could perceive all illusory opposites simply as the divine amalgamation of an eternally glowing flower, with each of its blossoming petals revealed to me lovingly, one by one. Yet, simultaneously and paradoxically, I also witnessed their unfoldment as voices chanting in a timeless, soundless unison.

In such an environment, the almost tangible obscurity of each airborne molecule surrounding my corporeal body would inevitably shimmer with tender white light—but only when I remained open to the possibility. The more receptive any of us can be (and the darker the night), the stronger the glow. In fact, whenever my own path became pitch black within those heavily veiled wilderness areas I used to frequent, it was then that my night vision predictably magnified in strength and I could see everything surrounding me even more clearly than at any other time during those types of treks.

However, for those of us who have never had the opportunity to experience such things, this subject can stir up a fair amount of cynicism among many. But before we close ourselves off permanently from this exceptionally vibrant part of life, it might be well to consider at least one recent scientific study that has shown how human bodies—and other living creatures as well—radiate a layer of light around themselves that is undeniably quantifiable.

To further emphasize this fact, a headline from an NBC Science News report read as follows:

HUMANS GLOW IN VISIBLE LIGHT…

The subsequent story proceeded with a July 2009 article originally published in *Live Science* by Charles Q. Choi after speaking with Masaki Kobayashi and other researchers at Kyoto University:

> The human body literally glows, emitting a visible light in extremely small quantities at levels that rise and fall with the day, scientists now reveal.
>
> Past research has shown that the body emits visible light, 1,000 times less intense than the levels to which our naked eyes are sensitive. In fact, virtually all living creatures emit very weak light, which is thought to be a byproduct of biochemical reactions involving free radicals.

(This visible light differs from the infrared radiation—an invisible form of light—that comes from body heat.)

To learn more about this faint visible light, scientists in Japan employed extraordinarily sensitive cameras capable of detecting single photons. Five healthy male volunteers in their 20s were placed bare-chested in front of the cameras in complete darkness in light-tight rooms for 20 minutes every three hours from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. for three days.

The researchers found the body glow rose and fell over the day, with its lowest point at 10 a.m. and its peak at 4 p.m., dropping gradually after that. These findings suggest there is light emission linked to our body clocks, most likely due to how our metabolic rhythms fluctuate over the course of the day.

Faces glowed more than the rest of the body. This might be because faces are more tanned than the rest of the body, since they get more exposure to sunlight. The pigment behind skin color, melanin, has fluorescent components that could enhance the body's miniscule light production…

The aforementioned article indicates that light emanates from the human body in addition to bodies of all other living creatures. However, the researchers of this particular study (and of other studies) have come to the conclusion that this type of light discharge is much too faint to be detected by the naked eye.

This may be true when it comes to people with average eyesight living in modern, urbanized domains where perpetual light pollution invariably dampens virtually everyone's capacity to perceive the more subtle emanations of light. Even if the aforementioned researchers' experiments gave test subjects a generous amount of time to adjust to the dark before proceeding with their testing trials, I do not believe even a few, preliminary hours of exposure to total darkness would be an ample amount of time for everyone's eyes to detect this kind of light.

It is more likely that numerous, long-term exposures to pitch-blackness would be needed (over a course of weeks or possibly months) before any of those reported bodily light emissions might actually become observable for most of us. Even then, some subjects may never be able to achieve the proper *focus* required for seeing in this manner.

In my own specific case, it took countless night hikes in heavily wooded areas and just

as many meditations in total darkness before I actually began noticing faint light emanating from my own body—even though I had exceptionally acute eyesight to begin with. Although it is true that I was aware of glowing lights all around me early on, I never became aware of their sources for a long time. After all, I didn't have anyone who had the skill or understanding to point out to me what these light manifestations were or from where they were actually coming.

During the twenty-first annual Festival of Faiths,[22] Rabbi Lawrence Kuschner recounted his own experiences in the wilderness—albeit, they seemed to have occurred solely during daylight hours. As he was speaking about his visit to the vast mountainous regions in Montana, he made this profound observation:

> You can walk where things are predictable or you can enter the wilderness. Without the terror and the joy of the wilderness, there can be neither reverence nor revelation. Sacred wisdom and its prerequisite (reverence, in other words) can only be found in the wilderness—a psycho-spiritual place where it is always and only NOW. If you can only remember what you have learned in the past or if you can only think in advance of what you will learn in the future, you won't be in the wilderness anymore, and it won't be sacred wisdom.

When he mentions *the terror and the joy of the wilderness*, Rabbi Kuschner was referring to (no less than at face value) how that extraordinarily beautiful region obviously filled him with great wonder and joy. But at the same time, the terror of which he also spoke alluded to his own personal dread of meeting up with grizzly bears while he was exploring nearby trails with his wife. Actually, he wasn't the only one ever to visit Montana who expressed concerns of having to come face-to-face with a grizzly, since those enormous and unpredictable bears are quite prevalent there.

As for my own experiences in the remote areas of the mountains in northern New England (where only the considerably less dangerous black bear species resides), I have almost always felt an acute elation while venturing through any of those vast and seemingly uninhabited regions. But oftentimes, the astounding wonderment those places tended to elicit within me was often magnified exponentially after sunset—especially, once the evening hours began to

[22] The 21st annual Festival of Faiths was held in 2016. The theme for the festival was "Sacred Wisdom: Pathway to Nonviolence".

quench all traces of remaining daylight. It happened only then when an even deeper sense of the wilderness was able to reveal itself to me. However, I might not have been so adventurous at night if grizzly bears wandered throughout the region.

After nighttime had long since snuffed out the lighted and readily observable world from my sight, I still might venture without any artificial light to the top of some exalted mountain peak. Yet, night-vision for me has always rejected and replaced any blind obscurity of the wee hours with resplendent panoramas fully (though delicately) aglow, even while most of us would continue to allege that those late-night landscapes existed solely as colorless palettes—comprising only profound and utter blackness.

When my urges for trekking after dark led me deep into remote, forest woodlands without the aid of flashlight or lantern, much of those shrouded settings nevertheless exposed themselves to me in a soft but radiant wonder. Their giant boles, boulders, and brooks exuded a light that would penetrate into all of the surrounding atmosphere. They also disclosed incandescent displays of cascades whirling their silvery liquids to earth in shining, frigid, hypnotic rushes. And these were only a small part of my own, personal *joy of the wilderness* that I experienced on countless occasions over the years.

Yet, what the rabbi mentioned in his talk about the wilderness, there indeed were profound terrors that also confronted me there—having been equally induced amid those paradoxical frontiers of simultaneous emptiness, abundance, solitude, omnipresence, desolation, and euphoria alike. Specific instances included the moments of dread felt immediately after I broke my ankle eleven miles from the nearest roadway. There was the case when I experienced an instantaneous though fleeting panic that overwhelmed me when coming face-to-face with that enormous red wolf. And equally, there was my ongoing, well-practiced, and pervasive fear of the dark that haunted me from the earliest days of my life and continued throughout many of my jaunts into the darkness of deep mountain forests.

The rabbi spoke of us all having a decisive choice to make. We can either continue proceeding through our predictable, day-to-day lives, filled with those dull, dualistic attachments to which we have systematically practiced clinging (because of their seemingly safe, uneventful familiarity), or we can let go of the oftentimes compassionless and monotonous comforts of the *predictable* by stepping across the boundaries of what is readily recognizable to us. Instead, we can journey into the unknown; or as Kuschner put it, we can *enter the wilderness*.

But wilderness areas in the physical world are not always accessible to all of us existing on this nature-shrinking, overdeveloped planet of ours. Nevertheless, we can still find a more personally stylized version of wilderness by sitting quietly within the darkened nave of some inner-city cathedral or even isolating ourselves within the confines of a backyard garden with as many lights turned off as we possibly can.

Of course, such a practice is obviously not going to allow us to develop night vision, but it most certainly can aid us while entering the wilderness of our hearts and minds. Regardless, a room dedicated to prayer and meditation can often be sealed off from light as well. I happened to do this in a couple of places where I lived where it was otherwise impossible to find lightless places to train myself to see in the dark.

But now, let us continue with the earlier story:

After about two or three years of lightless hiking in remote areas, I decided to proceed with each adventure wearing no shoes and subsequently journeyed as a barefooted, native scout might have done centuries ago. It somehow made me feel more as an integral part of this recently discovered reality.

Surprisingly, instead of having to force myself through an immutable and fear-filled void of blackness every time that I proceeded into the out-of-doors at night, I suddenly began anticipating with uncontainable joy an iridescent universe always awaiting me. It was filled with unlimited possibilities. Likewise, it forever appeared to be there ready to greet and to guide my entire being into epiphanies of wonder.

Yet, I had previously perceived the nighttime as nothing more than an impenetrable wall of blackened and blackening indiscernibility. It signified to me nothing other than an archetypal impedance—magnifying all mortal fears since our forebears were exiled from their primordial paradise. Indeed, midnight's seeming-void (often seen as an effective way to personify everything ominous and evil) had readily established itself as an ever-strengthening component of duality's weediness itself.

But now, with fresh eyes to see the true nature of lightlessness, this resplendent domain revealed itself as an edifice of eternal hope and healing. It had become my own garden sanctuary. Within its vast dominion, an infinite number of hallowed pathways patiently emanated soft, luminous light upon a tabula rasa waking unto configurations of blessed materiality. Glistening radiances directed me towards external and internal wildernesses alike.

I perpetually ventured through both of them while they persisted in resurrecting me from the pervasive darkness that hitherto has blinded equally my sight and my soul.

X.

Choosing to rehearse or neglect our ever-evolving sensorial abilities...

Each moment of every day, which of our senses do we practice using effectively and thereby strengthen in the process? Are there any sensory organs that we abuse excessively to the point of wearing them out or damaging them beyond repair? Also, what perceptions do we underuse, weaken, abandon altogether, and ultimately forget? Furthermore, what latent senses have we never used because of not knowing that they actually existed in the first place? Finally, if we discovered alternate perceptions to take the place of those we either lacked or lost, could we learn or be taught techniques that might fashion said alternatives as satisfactory replacements?

A few examples of the abuses many of us inflict upon such bodily attributes include staring daily at our computer screen for hours (without ever resting our eyes by actually closing them or changing focus onto other things from time to time) so our vision is strained and eventually weakened permanently. Or, who among us continually listens to extremely loud music or works in a dangerously noisy environment without considering the need for protection to shield our ears against acoustical overloads—thereby causing either partial or total hearing loss eventually? Additionally, habitual smoking or continuous exposure to other types of inhaled fumes or unhealthy substances we regularly inhale and/or swallow can deaden our abilities to smell and taste anything fully or accurately. And if we constantly subject our hands, feet, or other parts of the body's surface to constant physical impacts or expose them to extreme temperatures or harsh rays of sunlight, we can cause enough damage to either nerves or skin

so as to impede or destroy our sense of touch among other things.

In contrast, how few of us have had the very specialized training to be able to utilize our sense of touch for either enhancing or replacing our ability to see as many blind people have learned to do? It is also true how the deaf or hearing-impaired often develop their sense of touch to *feel* audio-vibrations. Aside from our obvious five physical senses, there are so many other more subtle senses that we might be able to discover within ourselves if we would only learn an effective method to identify and then practice utilizing them. Although there are those who might reject some of them as actual sensory perceptions, those who have accessed such capabilities and utilized them might certainly beg to differ.

As mentioned before very briefly, I have often reflected upon the more subtle *attributes* of the senses within other species including their highly intuitive perceptions and instincts. Consider how many lost pets have been left behind at a vacation getaway; yet a fair number of the animals trekked hundreds or even thousands of miles through untold perils to find a path leading them home.

Also, consider how whales, fish, and various species of birds can accurately navigate over thousands of miles to return to annual breeding grounds, milder winter habitats, and routine feeding areas. How many animals become extremely restless or even panic-stricken before impending earthquakes, tornados, and when other physical disasters are about to arise—even while we humans frequently go blithely about our business with no clue as to what is about to transpire? Granted, many species other than our own are known to have the built-in sense of magnetoreception[23] as a part of their physiology, but a consensus of at least some researchers is that this ability doesn't necessarily rely on just a single receptor (or sense organ), but on multiple senses.

However, just because we humans do not seem to have a specific biology conducive to this sort of *aptitude*, there have always been certain parts of our species' population that seem to operate with similar sensory capacities notwithstanding. For instance, my friend Little Wolf (the medicine man that I knew back in the 1970s) told me how he could trek by foot over hundreds of miles—even in unfamiliar territory and during the dead of night—and would wind

[23] According to *Wikipedia*:

> Magnetoreception is a sense which allows an organism to detect the Earth's magnetic field. Animals with this sense include arthropods, molluscs, and vertebrates (fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals, though not humans). The sense is mainly used for orientation and navigation, but it may help some animals to form regional maps.

up exactly where he wanted to be.

Although he did have keen night vision, he emphatically stated that this was only a small portion of the senses he relied upon while making such long journeys. He spoke of how it was essential for him to attune himself to the *spiritual powers* always leading him forward to his desired destinations. He talked about these cryptic forces as if they were akin to actual magnetic energies focusing and augmenting his sensory abilities. They appeared to manifest especially while he remained in either a meditative or trancelike state.

In retrospect, I now often wonder if this was some variant of magnetoreception or a very reliable alternative. His navigational abilities also reminded me of some of my own aptitudes coming into play during countless hikes after dark—though my skills were certainly not of the same high caliber as those of Little Wolf, and his descriptions of his guiding spiritual powers did resonate with my encounters with those guiding *magnetic hands* that continued to assist me over several decades. I spoke earlier of such occasions when a sort of mesmeric force directed (or navigated) me towards something beneficial while often nudging me away from imminent danger.

On a slightly different topic, there was an unforgettable Saturday night in November 2001 (the 17th to be exact) when I witnessed an extraordinary occurrence. It seemed as though countless animals were seeming to react quite noticeably to something that might have been affecting them electromagnetically. Whether or not it was a part of their actual sense of magnetoreception causing such a response from them, I don't really know. However, it definitely appeared that some unseen force was stirring up a vast multitude in the animal kingdom all night long.

I recall going outside during the late evening while the Leonid meteor *storm* was in full swing. There were hundreds of shooting stars streaking across the sky every hour (and even as many as a thousand per hour at its peak) while dozens of fireballs also made unforgettable appearances throughout the duration of that extraordinary event. At the time, I was living about halfway up a mountain where there were panoramic views of both the sky above and the valley below.

Aside from the ongoing, impressive meteoroidal display, it also seemed as though all of the local animals woke up unexpectedly during the middle of the night. Long before even the peak of those showers was underway, every type of bird began to chirp, squawk, hoot, and sing simultaneously. Bats were twittering unlike anything I have ever heard in my life.

Seemingly, most of the domestic dogs in the valley were barking, coyotes were yipping, and members of both species were yowling incessantly. Bears and other animals were calling out excitedly using their own unique forms of vocalizations as well. Even a couple of wolves were howling plaintively to one another off in the distance. At no other time had I experienced this sort of commotion stirring up every bird and beast. It was exhilarating to listen to but it was also a bit disconcerting at the same time.

What were they all hearing, feeling, or even seeing that we humans were incapable of noticing? Despite this, few of them (or, more likely, none at all) were looking heavenward to visually detect the ongoing celestial activity that had obviously played an important part in this uproar. Nevertheless, there must have been other ways this monumental event affected the lot of them as well.

The next day, when I was speaking with a group of students about the spectacular sightings many of us had witnessed the night before, several others had noticed how so many animals were stirred up when most of them should have been fast asleep. Two particular people remarked that they couldn't get their dogs to stop barking for hours. Remarkably, many of these students lived up to seventy miles away from my house on the mountain, so whatever was happening to all of those critters appeared to be occurring across a fairly wide area.

Considering how my own senses have been known to behave in an ultrasensitive fashion (especially when compared with the senses of many other people in our modern society), it wasn't at all a surprise when I too began *feeling* some odd things happening around me that night. This started even while I remained indoors and before becoming aware of the extraordinary activity occurring in the night sky out-of-doors.

My skin actually began to prickle in a way I had never felt before or since then. I also heard and even *felt* an incessant vibrating in the air, which appeared to be especially detected by the exposed surfaces of my face, arms, and legs. I often considered afterwards that maybe it was these sorts of sensations riling up so many of the animals nearby. But somehow, I suspected how they were probably experiencing far more than I could ever imagine.

There are possibly many abilities (sensory and otherwise) that are mechanisms exclusively built into certain animals, allowing them to function more effectively and/or more sensitively than any of our species could. But (in contrast), we also have obvious physiological advantages over other animals like those I addressed earlier in the book.

For example, the majority of us have the apparatus to recognize color more fully and

vibrantly than at least a certain number of other animals can distinguish. Conversely, there are most likely individual cases in any species (including the human one) that haven't been given the usual senses afforded the rest of their kind, or specific organs and/or abilities that were damaged or thwarted at birth, or at some time during the course of their lives, or possibly never existing at all. Despite this, they discovered ways to bypass those unavailable perceptions by developing alternate methods of sensorial processing and comprehension.

If we once again recall the story of Hellen Keller, this certainly describes what happened to her. However, making such remarkable and seemingly impossible transitions in her life definitely required the assistance of someone else to teach her novel and alternative means for managing and processing sensory input, which would have otherwise been unavailable to her throughout the entirety of her life.

This was also the case when it came to those two blind pianists I got to know briefly at music school. Because neither of them could see with their eyes, they inadvertently had practiced and developed alternate *senses* to assist themselves in navigating their own personal *sightless world*. However, no matter what perceptions and sensory apparatuses have functioned automatically for us since infancy, there are still other latent ones that can become functional only after a good deal of appropriate practice.

But now, let us continue with that earlier discussion I introduced in the previous section. If we recall, my speaking voice had to be revived after each relatively brief period of inactivity by simply having to practice using it again. Equally, my vision had been disengaged during extended exposures to complete darkness and it took a certain amount of time to regain normal sight when exposed to light once more. My wife and I also had either unwittingly revived or initiated for the very first time other sensory abilities through extensive practices of meditation and prayer.

This is most likely what happened when we experienced the BBC radio transmission from the 1940s among many other unique happenings during that particular segment of our lives. We were then utilizing those contemplative *tools* of meditation, affirmations, and prayer more than at any other time.

Correspondingly, when both of us refrained from applying these practices (or tools) with our erstwhile consistency and dedication, said abilities to perceive beyond what our conventional senses could normally process became considerably less effective once more—or in some cases, they disappeared altogether. It is important to reemphasize here, the BBC incident was only

one of dozens of extraordinary situations manifesting in that same period when we were both meditating optimally.

Whenever any of us happen upon our hitherto undiscovered and/or inactive sensory functions, they can potentially aid us in awakening abilities to experience yet beyond the clouded veils of time, distance, and space. We can perceive, embrace, and actually undertake the seemingly inexplicable and the otherwise impossible. It is in the awakening and practicing of these more elusive perception *tools* that allow us to sense and experience the wonders to which Rabbi Kuschner alluded when he spoke of our need to enter the *wilderness*—his *psycho-spiritual* realm not always available through simply utilizing our five basic senses.

As we practice *jumping* out of our old, deceptive yet well-practiced conditions into a more compassionate and acute state of awareness (and experience), this shift immediately establishes an actual *sense* of perceiving limitlessness within and around us while also freeing ourselves from deceptive, dichotomous weeds of limited and limiting existence, and it likewise focuses our entire being upon the *divine within*—thereby allowing us to live and function more fully as veritable conscious gardeners.

When such latent senses are finally discovered, initiated, and exercised through practices such as meditation, contemplation, and prayer, our abilities to comprehend reality beyond the physical parameters we hitherto have acknowledged as the immutable confines of all perception and experience, we suddenly stretch our reality to include phenomena occurring outside any of our preconceived boundaries of dichotomous *reality*—like our normally anticipated capacities to see (or not see) and believe (or not believe).

As a matter of fact, this is not dissimilar from what happened to the aforementioned fifteenth-century Caribbean natives. Spanish galleons were anchored alongside the aboriginal homeland isles long before their inhabitants were capable of recognizing the ships as truly being there.

Although an increased awareness of those indigenous people wasn't necessarily caused by any specific spiritual tool or newly formed sensory organ per se—which would expand their consciousness beyond the bounds of its *well-practiced* limitations—the arrival of the European explorers on their great ships most likely awakened and expanded the natives' perceptions by making them aware of things existing outside the predetermined borders of their former, well-practiced beliefs.

This is also similar to what happened to me while meditating on the pier near my aunt

and uncle's home on the Connecticut shore. Through ongoing, applied practice, heightened senses awakened within me—those transcending the distances through space and time—and became active in a way I never experienced before. So much so that I could see myself existing in several places simultaneously and sense an infinite timelessness enveloping all four of my separate yet unified selves.

That being said, if it had only been a product of some sort of delirium, I couldn't have seen myself engaged in that four-way contemplative exercise while my uncle simultaneously observed me in those four distinct locations as well—even though we were each witnessing the entire scene from totally different vantage points. And once we were actually standing next to each other while contemplating what had just transpired, the physical residues (still present upon my person from when each of my separate meditating selves were either sitting at the end of the pier, resting upon a shoreline boulder, hovering just above the seawater, and floating high above that entire scene) would never have been present for both of us to see. A joint fantasy also would never have left tangible traces of sand and barnacle fragments on my legs from the beach rock, wooden splinters all over the seat of my pants from the pier, wet arms from hovering just above the seawater, and wind-blistered lips from when I was levitating high in the sky.

Furthermore, we continued for months to deliberate upon every conceivable implication concerning that experience, and (along with several other people) we eventually came to the conclusion that I indeed had to have been in all four places at once—in one form or another.[24]

Aside from this noteworthy incident, there was also the recurring dream about how my entire family attended the wake for one of my other uncles years before it ever came to pass. Then, there was the time I dreamt being with my piano professor and we were playing checkers with a set of chess pieces more than seventy miles away from where the identical checkerboard and chess pieces were actually placed before my teacher just before the moment of his passing away. And also in that dream, I witnessed the temporarily different layout of the living room

[24] Just to be clear, neither my uncle nor I have ever taken psychedelic drugs that might be thought of as the reason for this particular incident to have happened. However, after decades of experiencing these types of phenomena, I eventually came to the conclusion that any dramatic shifts in sensorial awareness were simply a result of ardent prayer, conscious affirmations, and extensive meditational routines—combined with a never-ending practice developing the appropriate thoughts and beliefs promoting such manifestations to arise.

I have read and heard about dramatic perceptual changes in countless other individuals who have adhered to similar spiritual practices throughout the centuries. This indeed is nothing new or unheard of when it comes to these types of pursuits.

furniture that his wife had actually managed to rearrange earlier in the evening.

In addition to these memorable circumstances, there were a few others mentioned in this book along with dozens or possibly hundreds of other accounts that would have been impossible to include here. Even to describe just a handful more would add a disproportionately large addendum to our current discussion. Nevertheless, all of these situations had one thing in common:

> *They continuously revealed compelling indications that time, distance, and space are not necessarily what we have always perceived them as being and their presence becomes irrelevant when we awaken our underlying sensorial potential to perceive, practice, and actually prosper within the universal oneness that incorporates all things.*

In order to understand better why such happenings could be seen as simply the result of heightened sensory perceptions amply practiced, it might be helpful to contemplate on the following hypothetical scenario:

> Consider comparing the sensory abilities of an average person in our world with those of individuals in a mythical society where no one has the capacity to hear, feel, detect, or even dream of music in any shape or form. They aren't even capable of imagining that audible sounds creating any type of music could possibly exist.
>
> In our world, music is a sensory occurrence that everyone recognizes and has experienced in one way or another, oftentimes on a daily basis, and usually with the assistance of our ears. In fact, none of us most likely would be able to conceive of life without music in it.
>
> However, there was a reclusive and eccentric individual who lived among the people in that music-less culture who had built a peculiar gadget he referred to as his *piano*. There wasn't another person among them who had the slightest notion about how and for what purposes this peculiar device might be used.
>
> In fact, the seemingly normal approach to making sounds with that so-called piano was to clench both fists and bang on it haphazardly. Anyone nearby would insist that the only thing such a contraption could produce was an enormous amount of noise. We also might imagine everyone nearby could hear all of the banging, and the piano therefore became

> associated solely with constant clamor. Consequently, if someone made the claim that there was such a thing as music and the piano could produce inspiringly beautiful and powerful sounds, everyone else would instantly consider such an individual to be totally mad—or at least a tad delusional.

Yet (in such a musically deprived world), if anyone ever came to consider that this piano device might have even a slight capacity of being an actual extra-corporeal sensory *organ*, it still could have never been proven to be such a mechanism until its dormant potentials were actually discovered, regularly practiced, and finally mastered.

In contrast, if we instead lived in a world where no one had learned how to use their eyes, and everybody therefore developed heightened senses that are known to exist within a totally *blind* population, any deviances from those specific perceptions would no doubt be considered a disability—despite that in our seeing world such *inadequacies* are the norm and an attribute rather than the exception and a liability.

Additionally, if certain members of a sightless, closed-eyed society discovered that by opening their eyelids they could eventually perceive in a dramatically different way—thereby seeing with their eyes a myriad of indescribable things totally foreign to everyone else—then others in their world might declare this newfound sight of their social peers to be nothing more than fabrications or hallucinations. For most people in that society, such occurrences could only be symptoms of a delusional or imbalanced personality.

But these types of sensory shifts are not merely found in hypothetical situations like the ones just mentioned. In my own life, it would be useful to consider how (after breaking my ankle in the wilderness) my own heightened instincts, and those of my rescuer, directed both of us to a place where we would miraculously find one another. Such highly synchronistic encounters were not unfamiliar to me, nor are they unfamiliar to anyone who has practiced as I have practiced.

As was indicated earlier, these types of situations have been prevalent throughout my entire life. However, they did occur more readily during periods when I consciously and regularly utilized appropriate techniques to exercise my alternate senses—allowing them to increase their performance abilities. And needless to say, I am certainly not unique when considering the vast number of similar events occurring to countless individuals throughout history (and in today's world) who have practiced similar methodologies to my own.

When we stop exercising our five physical senses, our abilities to continue using them diminish while allowing them to fall into neglect. We may be surprised momentarily when they suddenly fail to work at all. But in the end, we simply practice exercising them once again until normal (or near-normal) functionality resumes. Ultimately, we think little of this possibility because we have practiced employing them almost nonstop since infancy.

But if we start using intuition consistently to see beyond what is normally thought to be *seeable*—transforming that seemingly mythical *third eye*[25] into an authentic and viable sensory organ—commence practicing our abilities of hearing beyond the normal capacity to perceive sound, realizing and even interacting with alternate realities while they are being viewed through dreaming, to speak with *saints* and *angels* (or in modern parlance, communicating with beings from other dimensions and parallel universes—even as they take on the role of psychological archetypes concurrently), all of these potentially perception-building endeavors will no longer behave with the inconsistent and vague results that have previously given them the notorious reputation of being solely imaginary, unreal, and/or hallucinated. Instead, they will be accepted as additional tools that we now can include within our sensory toolbox.

Nonetheless, they definitely are still products of our mind. But so is everything else in the physical world. After all, this is the **mind garden**. Neuroscience currently tells us that we don't actually see with our eyes, hear with our ears, smell with our nose, taste with our tongue, nor touch with our skin. Instead these perceptions occur exclusively within the brain. But the brain is ultimately the physical processing center for the mind, that place from where all physical reality not only originates but actually occurs.

Despite this, any type of extrasensory perception is often considered to be a figment of fancy, a delusion, a mental aberration, and even a possible symptom of psychosis. Unfortunately, few consider the likelihood that there are actual functions in the body that allow us to perceive beyond what is accepted as the current norm. After all, our five physical senses came to be known as the full extent of our sensory apparatuses only because our constant practice utilizing them exclusively since birth has made them so.

Just because the capacity in human beings to perceive past these recognized sensorial thresholds usually will not occur on any noticeable level, it doesn't mean that it isn't possible.

[25] According to *Wikipedia*:

> The **third eye** (also called the **mind's eye** or **inner eye**) is a mystical invisible eye, usually depicted as located on the forehead, which provides perception beyond ordinary sight.

Yet, when we do actually begin to activate and develop perceptions usually considered doubtful for our species to have, such awarenesses frequently function erratically and inconsistently solely from nonuse.

In other words, they may often produce inconsistent or even crazy results, not necessarily because we are imbalanced or mentally ill. Instead, irregularities may be derived merely from lack of practice, and also deficient in the necessary experience and intellectual comprehension required to interpret accurately what is being observed.

However, individuals who practice developing alternate senses (like those regularly developed by proficient meditators) find that their heightened abilities to observe, perceive, and eventually to understand said perceptions often develop awarenesses reaching far beyond the corporeal parameters of our five physical senses.

When considering each of my own illuminating, transformational, and even life-saving encounters about which I have spoken throughout this book (alongside hundreds of other personal accounts that I have left untold), if we simply label them as hallucinations, then all of these occurrences must be considered nothing more than sheer artifice—an aberrational construct of the mind. And if this actually is the case, was every exceptional event that has deeply enriched my life then been founded purely on mental mirages?

It is generally thought that those who hallucinate cannot control, interact with, be affected by, or benefit from anything hallucinatory; nor is it usually accepted that hallucinations can precisely foresee or foretell future events—or accurately transmit or depict situations and conditions occurring simultaneously at different physical locations on the planet. When adhering to these provisions alone, then virtually all of my experiences do not fall into any of those categories referring to such delusions, despite the seeming intangibility or inexplicability of their nature. And this can be said about the same types of situations experienced by countless others.

So, whenever any of us begin to perceive beyond which is accepted as typically conventional sensory awareness, it is important not to rule out the possibility that we can cross a threshold into an area of cognizance that will truly enhance our existence—even to contemplate the likelihood of senses outside those we have always known to exist. However, in order for them not to be simply wishful thinking, an aberration, or a delusion of any sort (like so many people have designated them to be), it is essential to practice exercising and experimenting with these sensitivities. Moreover, they should be utilized with the sole intention of expressing and further manifesting divine love. Otherwise, any such perception will be

nothing other than part of some seesaw mechanism of duality. And they certainly can include all aberrations and—indeed—all hallucinations as well.

XI.

The discovery and use of heightened perceptions as they emerge from both seemingly physical and nonphysical roots...

When I was eleven or twelve, an esteemed psychologist (with his wife and children) moved into a house next door to where my family was then-currently residing. During that period of time when I was transitioning from childhood into early adolescence, I found that entering various shops and businesses to be quite intrusive to my sense of hearing. Because of an extremely high-pitched sound that would pierce my ears so severely, my head often felt as though it might split wide open. I occasionally could detect the same sounds while walking down certain streets, although the intensity tended to be less severe in open air.

After having been acquainted with our neighbor-doctor for a year or two, I finally gathered up enough courage to confide in him. Because I thought that he—being a highly educated and rational man—might be able to explain objectively and sympathetically what was actually happening to me. After I told him about several instances when this type of situation occurred with my hearing, rather than offering any practical, insightful, or consoling remarks, he dispassionately stated instead that I was hallucinating.

Sometime thereafter, my mother happened to take my little sister and me into a jewelry store where she planned to get her wristwatch repaired. As soon as she escorted us through the front door, we both cupped our hands over our ears and began to cry. My mother was obviously alarmed and embarrassed by this unanticipated outburst. Consequently, she began yelling at us and insisted that we quiet down and behave!

Luckily, the storekeeper witnessed all the commotion and politely interjected. He insisted that our reaction was completely understandable. With the current technology, security systems apparently emitted an intense, high-pitched tone that occasionally could be detected by individuals with exceptional hearing. Most people would never notice the sound. But to some, it could be annoying; and to a few, it essentially could be extremely painful and disconcerting. For my sister and me, apparently the latter was the case.

He promptly suggested that she send us outside while finishing up her business in the store. This particular instance certainly was one of the most extreme examples of when I was unexpectedly exposed to such unbearably shrill and penetrating noises. However, as alarm systems improved over the years, these audibly invasive emissions became virtually nonexistent and I was no longer plagued by them when entering an area that had electronic security.

To this day, I owe that jeweler a supreme debt of gratitude. If he hadn't kindly taken the time to console both my sister and me, and to explain to my mother what we were actually experiencing, the offhanded and careless pronouncement made by our psychologist neighbor might have had even a more prolonged and consequential impact on me than it already did.

For more than two decades, I had a similar reaction to many televisions. Before TVs were built with transistors, they were actually manufactured with tubes. Up until possibly the early 1980s, many people (including my parents) hadn't yet changed over to tubeless television sets. Those older models emitted a constant, ultrahigh tone that some people found very unsettling, including myself. It wasn't always excruciating for me to experience, but it regularly prevented me from going to sleep at night. That being said, there were still times when I found the unrelenting noise unbearable.

Once my father had become an invalid after his life-altering accident in the early 1960s, he frequently kept the TV on all night—even until well after daybreak. He almost always fell asleep while watching, and his *boob tube* continued to run for hours unattended. In those days, there were no stations that offered programming all night. So once each broadcast day had ended, the national anthem would be played and then a station identification tone could be heard blaring nonstop over the airwaves until scheduled programming resumed the following morning. Consequently, not only did I have to withstand the high-pitched racket, but that nasty identification tone had to be tolerated as well.

Since my bedroom was directly above the room where the TV would remain on all night

(and nearly every night), I felt the impact of its incessant noise far more than either my sister or brother did. On numerous occasions, the mercilessly perpetual pitches seemed more intolerable than usual. They virtually were screaming at me for hours. There were several times when I knew that I had important exams to take at school the next morning, so it was essential to get even a little sleep before dawn. Otherwise, the next day's test results might prove to reduce my grade point average substantially.

For that reason, I crept downstairs and dared an attempt to do what was strictly prohibited in our household. No one could turn off the TV while my father was allegedly watching it. This certainly held to be true even as he snored loudly within an arm's reach of the screen.

When I tiptoed into the room, the volume control was turned up to its insufferably loud level as usual. The unceasing racket of the *station identification tone* was accompanied by those other brain-splitting, ultrahigh pitches. Both of these audible attacks simultaneously unraveled any remaining composure that I might have retained up until then.

As soon as I mustered enough pluck to press the off-button so the room would become uncharacteristically silent, my father almost always woke up instantly and began to bellow despondently at me. He repeatedly yelled out that I had no right to shut off his *shows*. Then, he would order me to turn the set back on and go back to bed. My choice was either to comply or be physically thrashed instead.

With a sense of submission and despair, I always brought the audible environment back to its regular roar and slumped away to my room. Despite being in a state of utter exhaustion, I nonetheless was capable of silently sobbing myself into a comatic slumber of an all-too-brief duration. At least I had an hour or so until I was obliged to resurrect myself and prepare for school. However, those final few moments of total resignation would bring upon me a fleeting facsimile of rest in any case.

Occasionally, I collected enough courage to confront my parents about this situation. Yet, my complaints were never taken seriously. When I insisted that the television had been consistently keeping me awake all night, both of them would just laugh and then refer to me simply as being:

…just a bit too sensitive!

A few years later, I was compelled to leave music school prematurely because of ongoing illness. Once my college days were over I also left home permanently. After that, I chose not

to keep the television that my parents insisted on giving me as a parting gift. In fact, I never owned another TV for the next two decades.

Throughout my twenties, I often found it maddening to visit residential neighborhoods in the evening or on weekends. Both of these times were when the largest number of people would be at home, glued to their TVs, watching their regular programs. So, these were also the most likely times when I would be battered by the largest number of those earsplitting, ultrahigh sounds.

Hundreds (or even thousands) of sets simultaneously emitted their *auditory interference* in close proximity to one another whenever I was passing through any suburban or uptown residential community. While being assaulted by all of those technological contraptions pounding their invasive, inescapable noise into my brain, the results oftentimes left me completely debilitated. I regularly got intense headaches and experienced nausea whenever it was impossible for me to escape from those widely colonized clusters of deafening television sets.

After I was married in 1973, my wife and I lived together for over a decade. During several of those years, we frequently visited my parents in the late evening, even though my mother normally would still be at work when we arrived. For many years, *mom* normally didn't return home until close to midnight.

One time, when we first began those nocturnal outings to my parents' place, I was driving the two of us along a dirt road that led to their house. Once we climbed to the top of a short but relatively steep hill, the well-kept residence then could be seen in the distance. Because there seemed to be no obvious lamplight seeping from any of the windows, my wife exclaimed disappointedly that no one was there.

But I disagreed straightaway. She then turned to me in surprise and asked how I knew this. My reply was:

The TV's on. I can hear it.

A minute later, when we entered the driveway, the both of us could see a dim, lambent light mysteriously oozing out of the window that was situated closest to my father's television.

I explained to her that my dad often sat in the dark while watching; and although I could never detect the actual audio coming from the set at such distances, I definitely could hear those far-reaching, high-pitched tones. So whenever we began the final approach to their place,

she always inquired if I could *hear* the television. Frequently, she might also transform this simple question into an extended, mischievous impromptu-interrogation:

Is your dad asleep?
Is he awake?
What show's he watching?
Can you hear him snore?
What color shirt is he wearing?

Her queries often persisted for the next couple of minutes until we parked and were about to get out of the car. And sometimes, if she continued hounding me for answers by the time we had walked to their doorstep, her perpetual probing would frequently reach further heights of silliness. And if we hadn't had anything to eat yet, she finally might add:

What's dad eating for dinner?
Can we have some too?

This initial line of questioning remained a ritualized jest between us until my mother happened to purchase a newer, tubeless model several years later. Thereafter, I was immediately blessed with no longer being able to detect any long-range noises originating from their sitting room. My prognosticating abilities came to an abrupt end—as did my wife's ceremonial banter. Consequently, never again could either of us know if anyone were at home until we spotted those familiar, flickering shadows leaping out from my father's favorite programs.

In earlier years, when I was still living with my family, I recall overhearing a conversation my mother was having with our next-door neighbors. She was telling the psychologist and his wife about my ability to hear these ultrahigh sounds; and she was upset that I frequently complained about being kept up all night, because it never was quiet enough for me to sleep.

Rather than suggesting to her that the television should definitely be turned off, the doctor instead referred to my having abnormal behavior, audio hallucinations, and possible mental illness. He patronizingly suggested that she should bring me to a psychiatrist so I could begin taking some medication that would alleviate my *symptoms*.

In more recent years, I began interpreting this event from a mind-gardener's perspective as being nothing more than a typically dichotomous *weed infestation* forming in my life.

Actually, other numerous dualistic challenges about my physical and mental health began to crop up as well. They first manifested as a slew of questions:

Am I actually sane or just a hypochondriac like my mother often tells me?
Are the doctors always right?
Should I refuse their advice when it seems to harm rather than help me?
Isn't it crazy to take medication that continually makes me feel worse?
Will I ever get better?
Or must I accept that I'll be sick for the rest of my life?
Am I going to die young?
Otherwise, might I live long enough to see my fortieth birthday?

At the moment when our neighbor was unable to consider any possibility other than his erroneous claim that the noises I had been *hearing* were hallucinations (indeed, possibly caused by psychosis), his carelessly offhanded and harmful assessment became an influential part of a decade-long seesawing ride. Subsequently, I frequently questioned both my mental and physical stability for years.

Those heightened sensitivities to external environmental conditions were situated at one end of the seesaw, continuously challenged by the opposite seesawing side that accommodated the countless, blind, insensitive, and unscientific assertions of well-meaning physicians and non-physicians alike. Each of them wasn't dissimilar to the psychologist who lived next door.

During this early portion of my teenage years, the junior high school that I was attending required each student to have both eyes and ears tested by appropriate physicians. So my mother dutifully carted me off to a highly recommended *ear doctor* and then to an eye specialist in turn. I must confess that these two memorable visits were the only doctors' appointments that I could actually consider as being truly enjoyable.

In each case, the physicians were amazed by my sensory acuity. The doctor who tested my hearing exclaimed excitedly that during his entire career he never knew of anyone who could detect both the extremely high and low sounds that I was capable of recognizing instantly. In fact, he happily declared that I had the widest hearing range of anyone with whom he had encountered throughout his long professional life as a doctor.

The eye specialist was equally impressed with my sight. Not only did he discover that I

could navigate the entire standard eye chart effortlessly, but he pulled out two other charts that had increasingly smaller letters, and I aced both of them as well. He jokingly told my mother that she should rent me out to a local research lab. Winking at me, while he added with a grin:

They could use you as a microscope!

Although my other three physical senses (touch, taste, and smell) never were tested by any professional, they also appeared to be unusually acute. When I was very little, if my mother accidentally brushed my hair in an unexpected direction, the different pressure put upon the hair roots would actually hurt. In fact, small bruises might appear on my scalp soon thereafter.

I sensed things with my fingers that others couldn't. Also, my ability to detect the freshness, quality, and many subtle ingredients that were found in a wide variety of foods certainly was above average. If there were unexpected fumes in the air, I regularly could taste things without putting them into my mouth in addition to simply smelling such odors.

Although each of my five senses definitely are no longer anywhere nearly as effective as they once were, they continue to be rather potent nevertheless. This especially holds true when it comes to detecting odors—including those to which gave me serious allergic reactions. Consequently, because of my peculiar olfactory talents, a former student occasionally referred to me unflatteringly as a *canary in the mineshaft*.[26]

I recall visiting a friend for the first time at his newly-acquired Boston apartment on my fortieth birthday. He recently had moved there and wanted me to come down and check out the place. His plans for my visit included inviting me out to lunch; and later, he would host a potluck dinner party to continue celebrating my special day.

Since most of the invited dinner guests were an assortment of Southeast Asians, I knew that the menu would be representing a variety of ethnic cuisines such as Thai, Vietnamese, and Indonesian—all of them being among my favorites. Some homemade Chinese food was to be on the table as well. Consequently, we both awaited the evening meal with enormous relish and anticipation.

I arrived at the apartment in mid morning. While entering the main lobby of his building,

[26] Before devises had been invented to warn miners of a dangerous level of gas buildup in mineshafts, canaries often were used as a primitive and somewhat barbaric *early-warning device*. Cages with canaries would be placed throughout the tunnels. As long as the birds could be heard singing, miners knew that they were safe. But since these songbirds are extremely sensitive to gas odors and will drop dead well before the fumes are lethal enough to affect humans, or before an explosion could be triggered, they played a vital role as gas detectors. Because once the canaries stopped singing, the mine workers knew that they must vacate the premises immediately in order to avoid catastrophe.

my nose immediately was assaulted by a strong odor of gas, the type used in stoves and heaters. After he buzzed down to the front door to let me into a beautiful and spacious atrium, he came out of his apartment and greeted me from the third balcony up from the ground level. Still standing at the atrium entrance, I called out to him and asked if there was a gas leak inside the place. Those fumes that I had noticed initially seemed to be intensifying quickly, even as we spoke.

I proceeded up the grand, spiral staircase to the first tier. With each step taken, the gas smell continued to increase. My friend nevertheless thought that I was simply imagining such a smell, because he couldn't detect anything out of the ordinary. However, I mentioned to him that people often were unable to distinguish this type of odor if their senses have been saturated with it over a prolonged period.

After continuing further up the stairs, I eventually took the last step that brought me to the third level. His apartment door was directly ahead of me and remained wide open. Surprisingly, the unpleasant aroma seemed to be emanating from this direction. When I mentioned it to him, he just gazed at me with more than a hint of skepticism. Then, I asked if there was a gas stove in his kitchen. Astonished by my inquiry, he reluctantly replied in the affirmative.

Finally posing one remaining question, I asked if the pilot light on the stove had gone out. Immediately, a puzzled look was forming on his face while he replied sheepishly:

What's a pilot light?

I explained to him that it is a small, gas-generated flame that must remain lit continuously. Its function is to provide a constant spark source that allows the stove's cooking burners to ignite automatically.

In case this is accidentally extinguished, the propane manufacturers impregnate their otherwise-odorless gas with an unpleasant scent of *rotten eggs*. It is intended to alert all users when fumes are leaking into the atmosphere. Without such a warning, an undetectable gas buildup in any enclosed space eventually could cause carbon monoxide asphyxiation; or a sudden spark or unexpected flame might trigger an explosion.

While I was explaining these sobering details to him, he led me into his kitchen where I discovered immediately that the pilot light indeed had gone out. Once relit, its tiny flame reappeared and the unpleasant odor began to subside. But we still opened every window to air

out the rooms as quickly as possible.

Throughout the rest of the morning we continued discussing this incident. Just before we were about to leave the apartment and head out for our celebratory luncheon, I began to feel very ill. It suddenly became increasingly difficult for me to breathe, so I asked him if any of his neighbors smoked cigarettes. The recognizable and irritating odor seemed to be growing rapidly all around me.

With an expression of concern, he admitted that the man from Hong Kong who lived next door was a chain smoker. But, he also added that the partitions between apartments were extremely thick, and he couldn't conceive of how any cigarette smoke might penetrate through those heavily insulated, well-plastered walls. However, I then indicated that what I had been smelling seemed to be emanating from the entryway. Presumably, the fumes were getting in through the cracks around the front door to his apartment.

Stunned by my assertion, he nevertheless went to open the door and peeked into the outer hall. Much to his amazement, he discovered the Chinese man standing only a few feet away. This older gentleman greeted him with an amicable hello. Scarcely having come out of his own, adjoining rooms to light up a cigarette, this fellow was just in the middle of blowing out the lit match.

My friend then made a sudden about-face as he emphatically placed both hands on his hips. Continuing to look in my direction, he immediately instigated an exceptional grin and blurted out in the same instant:

How on earth did you know that?

During the several months when I was hiking every day in 2007, I discovered that my five physical senses heightened once again (even as I was reaching the relatively mature age of fifty-five), not only from the hours of meditation in which I engaged regularly, but because I now was living mostly in a densely forested mountain region. My sensory abilities were starting to revive by no longer being saturated with excessive man-made stimuli.

There were no cars or trucks whizzing by me. All revving engines and traffic lights ceased to exist, and loud music no longer could be cranked out of an endless barrage of car stereos and boom boxes. The sky became devoid of droning planes and churning helicopters. Traffic noise was non-existent. There were no honking horns nor passenger doors slamming shut.

With their reeking, deafening duties of crashing, crushing, and grinding garbage,

sanitation vehicles vanished within this domain of abundant, calm, and untainted atmosphere. Shrieking sirens, wailing whistles, clattering trains, and the seismic rumblings from subway tunnels seemingly vanished altogether. Throngs of milling, chattering, arguing, shouting, screaming, laughing, weeping, scuffling, pushing, and shoving bodies also dissolved instantly within such rarified realms of ether.

Littered streets transmuted into pristine pathways. Billboards, TV screens, computer monitors, cellphones, public-address systems, and neon signs no longer were smashing the senses with an endless procession of unsolicited advice, blatant advertisements, and invasive announcements. They simply had slipped away into an all-consuming serenity of mountains and wilderness.

However, this sparse brand of prevalent peace is an endangered species nowadays. It has become the ultimate outcast among our ever-expanding, over-populated, sensorially-polluting urbanized environments. These human-grown habitats have been spreading across the face of planet earth like inescapable tsunamis.

Yet, on a bright summer's day, and within the quietude of dense forestland, I was travelling along a flat and wide riverside trail that would lead me to a steep pathway. It in turn would climb up the mountainside to breathtaking views at the summit. Although I was carrying my fifty-pound pack and had stuffed it to the brim at daybreak, I nevertheless persisted pacing myself with long and brisk strides throughout the entire trek.

Around noontime, I began to notice a distinctly sweet, pungent, and irritating odor of one particular brand of laundry detergent to which I am highly allergic. I assumed that someone must be camping nearby, but for the next fifteen minutes there were no indications of anyone else being present in the vicinity. This factor I found to be highly perplexing while continuing my speedy tromp through the woods. Finally, two figures could be seen in the distance. Even while they were approaching me steadily from further along the trail, it still took a couple minutes more before all of us met and began to chat briefly.

As I drew closer to them, olfactory indications confirming the presence of that unpleasant detergent increased considerably, so the source of this scent became clear. Since these folks obviously were experienced hikers, walking at a robust pace similar to my own, it soon crossed my mind that we must have been at least two (or even three) miles apart when I first began to *smell* their presence. At first, this realization seemed to be absurd, but I reassessed my guesstimate more than once and always arrived at the same conclusion. To add to the seeming

mysteriousness of my situation, there wasn't even the slightest breeze to aid in carrying the odor over such an impressive distance.

After we parted company, I was reminded of several stories that I had read when I was younger. Tribal warriors in the Americas often detected the odor of enemies while they were still far away. And to add to this overall sensory acuity, when placing their ears to the ground, they could hear and feel subtle noises and vibrations that could reveal the distance between themselves and their quarry. Also, because they had no electric light bulbs to contaminate their ability to see in the dark, they often could easily close in on an adversary's position and perform successful night raids. These seemingly incredible skills were only possible because of their keen sense of sight, hearing, and smelling. That is to say, each of them was highly developed by modern standards.

There were similar accounts about GIs fighting during the Vietnam War. When they were getting ready to go out on reconnaissance missions into the jungle, army scouts had to live quarantined from all other soldiers. They ate only Vietnamese food and refrained from smoking altogether so their body odor wouldn't stand out among the familiar, native scents in the region. They also didn't use artificial light at night and learned tracking techniques that increased their abilities to see in the dark (instead of relying solely on the infrared goggles that other soldiers used), hear subtle noises, and feel vibrations. This type of training was a vital strategy for camouflaging their odor, distinguishing the movements of anyone else in the area, and remaining virtually undetectable to the local population.

Ordinarily, the Viet Cong could detect American soldiers coming from miles away and frequently pinpointed their location due to the noticeably unique aroma. Because of Yankee-style grub that our infantrymen consumed, the communist guerrillas became very familiar with their smell—not only because of the cooking smoke and grease saturating their uniforms, but (more pronouncedly) because of the unique redolence from their actual sweat. Consequently, the North Vietnamese often referred to our troops simply as *hamburger*.

So, after reminding myself of these stories, then it wasn't so difficult to understand why I could *smell* the hikers from a distance. Certainly, my physical senses have always been considered much more acute than those of many other people I have known, but perhaps that is partially because I have frequently lived in environments where my senses were not constantly being bombarded by the excessive stimuli to which the majority of people in today's society are subjected. I have often wondered if I knew personally an aboriginal tracker from

the Australian outback, or a native hunter who lived in the remotest regions of the Amazon, how might my senses compare to theirs? It shouldn't be difficult to imagine that their abilities would most definitely surpass my own by a significant amount.

Admittedly, the light bulb is a great invention and electricity allows us luxury, flexibility, and security far beyond anything known to humanity before the twentieth century. However, these things have their drawbacks as well. Certainly, as eye glasses aid our ability to see, they also make our eyes lazier as we become more and more dependent on the plastic lenses to do the lion's share of focusing for our eyes. The same goes for many of our great technological advances that continually provide us with new and fascinating benefits. We type now rather than write by hand. Penmanship is going the way of the dinosaur. Students use calculators instead of learning to perform mathematical computations in their heads. Even our computers can correct our spelling and grammar, so we no longer need to study those things proficiently if we choose not to do so. And finally (and perhaps most disturbingly) artificial intelligence can now write our essays, draw up legal contracts, design and print ads, generate business reports—limiting or ending the need for us to use our five senses in fulfilling a wide variety of other tasks.

It goes without saying that there are countless benefits for advocating and employing these aids, but few of us question what we are losing by not continuing with many of the skills that our technologies are rapidly replacing. This isn't only true with tools that enhance our physical senses, but what about how our modern conveniences can act simply as seductive, diversionary tactics that diminish or destroy our abilities to perceive beyond simple seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching?

In fact, companies are constantly trying to make our gadgets more and more seductive so we'll want to buy them whether or not we truly need them to live full, happy, healthy, and productive lives. But, as with all material enhancements, they eventually ware out, break down, and fail. If our natural abilities are so unused and unpracticed that they no longer work for us, what will happen if a natural or manmade disaster, the depletion of material resources, or an autocratic tyrant pulls the plug on all of our fancy gadgetry?

When I was twenty-one, I wrote a short poem that addressed this question. After completing it, someone secretly entered the piece on my behalf in a poetry contest and (much to my amazement) I was awarded first prize. Subsequently, I received a small amount of cash and was delighted to discover that it had also been published in a local suburban newspaper.

Aside from that, I received a number of touching letters from individuals thanking me for

the message that the poem conveyed. I was delighted and grateful to discover how those simple words affected so many others. Although the written text had been destroyed during the flood inundating the bottom floor of my house in 2007—and I no longer remembered it entirely by heart—I nevertheless was able to reconstruct its three simple stanzas with reasonable accuracy. There are certainly a few modifications that I hope would be seen as genuine improvements even while the original title remains untouched. I still refer to it as "Limitation Addict":

Candlelight is a vice, you know—
Hindering our path through the night.
It ravages radiance that blackness emits
By flooding our senses with artificial light.

Promised a world of boundless brightness,
We're blinded instead within limited cells
That deflect all brilliance from midnight's vastness
And the glowing shimmers every starlight tells.

But what will happen when candlemakers leave,
When bees fly away with their wax;
How will we cope when the lights go out
So we're left alone in the dark?

While human society continues to immerse itself in an avaricious materialism that would be inconceivable for earlier generations of our species to ever imagine, we forever pride ourselves on the many technological advancements including those physical devises that allow us to communicate with one another at great distances by picking up the telephone, sending a written letter almost instantaneously by email, or appearing face-to-face with our friends, family members, and colleagues while living halfway around the world via the magic of video conferencing. In an exclusively dualistic sense, we have bridged the isolating gaps that time, distance, and space forever fashion and fortify even while we also forge a fragile dependency that has weakened and often eradicated earlier forms of perception that might be seen as essential tools for the mind gardener even nowadays.

And currently, because when any of us dare to admit using more intangible forms of communication and awareness—those activated by sensory abilities frequently abandoned or

forgotten, and potentially being an actual portal into our truest nature of balance, oneness, and divine love—we are sometimes considered as being eccentric, delusional, or outright mad instead. I always thought it was terribly ironic that many of us bestow so much importance upon all of our marvelous contraptions, which we continually develop and cling to addictively. Yet, very few of us actually acknowledge our dreams, visions, and voices from where many of those gadgets have emanated initially; so when we do in fact happen to develop our more intangible senses—either for the first time or for any number of repeated times—then our obsessive dependence on those gadgets oftentimes no longer seem to be as essential as we previously thought.

As mentioned before, I often speculated in the past whether or not my own heightened physical senses were solely a product of genetics; or perhaps, they instead came about through the intentions of daily meditation and from living much of the time in relatively remote regions where the interferences from human technology were greatly reduced. But in all probability, my sensorial acuities were both inherited and practiced.

On the other hand, because it also is true that I have heard of no blood relation of mine—living or deceased—whose five physical senses were reported to be so highly sensitive (other than my paternal grandfather perhaps), my having such sharp senses is still probably due to various forms of practice through conscious and even more arbitrary means.

That being said, these sensory abilities of mine indeed increased substantially during my early teens after I began spending enormous amounts of time in deep contemplation and prayer. Yet, as this introspective part of my life waned during the latter half of high school, also did some of the sensory prowess that manifested consistently only a short spell earlier.

Though, after I discovered how to meditate at the age of eighteen, all of my senses began gradually to sharpen once again; and during my twenties when one of my chief objectives was to *sit*[27] for several hours each day, the abilities to see, hear, touch, smell, and taste also intensified more than at any other time before or since then. In fact, each physical sense appeared to expand so dramatically that my abilities to perceive also seemed to stretch beyond the bounds of what we typically consider as being objective reality.

My normal sight and hearing occasionally extended into the often-disputed domains of both precognitive seeing and hearing. Additionally, my capacity to feel, taste, and smell also

[27] *Sitting* is a common term used by meditators, referring to the act of meditating.

increased considerably. I consequently started to recognize phenomena that supposedly are not a part of this tangible existence.

A number of these occurrences demonstrating such things were recounted in previous chapters. Although I believe that all of these manifestations indeed resulted from heightened perceptions rather than hallucinations, since they tended to benefit me in numerous ways that mere hallucinations are not capable of doing, there are still those who would insist that such experiences couldn't be anything else other than figments of the imagination.

Genuine hallucinations indeed are regularly caused by mental illness, head injuries, brain disease, acute chronic pain, nutritional deficiencies, extreme sensory deprivation, and psychotropic drugs. Consequently, it might be prudent not to jump to the conclusion that any ability to discern things undiscernible to most shouldn't be put necessarily into one generalized category—conveniently labeled as *hallucinations*. Those other seemingly incorporeal forms of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching that balanced and healthy individuals have actively experienced should be thought of as bona fide perceptions rather than figments of the imagination.

That being said, in their early stages of use, such fledgling perceptions can readily appear to be nothing more than misty daydreams or delusions; so at this initial stage of development, it is understandable why any number of people might jump to the conclusion that such occurrences have to be hallucinatory in nature. Yet, when we discover how to initiate a mindful, unforced meditative practice making these types of sensory perceptions more conducive to revealing the most encouraging, healing, instructive, profitable, and even life-saving experiences—the sort of things which no actual hallucination could ever produce—it then will be more readily apparent that such occurrences are simply being detected by actual sensory *mechanisms*, whether or not being currently detectable or undetectable.

Even though while the more intangible perceptions hitherto have been associated exclusively with the brain, mental functions, and activities of the *mind*, we still must concede that everything detected with our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin are also somewhat intangible and illusory in at least some similar respects. After all (as I emphasized earlier in this section), science now acknowledges that we do see with our brain and not with our eyes. Neither do we hear with our ears, smell with our nose, taste with our tongue, nor touch with our skin.

In fact, all of outer reality essentially emanates and also plays out in the brain. Each of the five physical sensory organs, acting solely as receptors, provide this vital, bodily nerve

center with enough data to construct what we accept to be our ostensibly palpable reality. If we go one step further, perhaps every material inch existing within the confines of our brains is essentially nothing more than an *exterior casing* for the mind.

That being said, the mind itself is feasibly the womb of thought, the physical portal to consciousness, and the fertile soil from which grows all conceivable materiality into actual blossoms of the palpable. Hence, this is naught other than the source and substance of the mind garden.

If we seriously consider these assessments as being true, it should therefore appear reasonable not to regard all inexplicable or intangible experiences simply as mental mirages and the evidence of a hallucination at work. Just because they stem from the mind is not conclusive evidence that they also must be imaginary constructs. It is no more likely (or unlikely) for them to be mental figments than anything else we might otherwise assume as being a genuine component of our material existence.

XII.

Sharpening senses, expanding sentience, and shifting dualistic tendencies into a genuine wellspring of empathy and love...

Wherever dichotomies exists, for every positive belief or opinion—and with each discovery, advancement, and benefit achieved—there also rise potential negative outcomes, identifiable setbacks, reversals, and detriments as well. Is human civilization really progressing, or are we just continually extending each end of a seesaw that is forever enabling dualistic weeds to persist in an inconceivable number of guises?

In all aspects of our societal activities, we witness diurnally the contradictory fruit of that

so-called *Tree of Knowledge*[28] at work. There are those in science who vocally denounce all religion as hypocrisy and the sole cause of much worldly tribulation throughout the ages, disregarding the multitude of devastations that the countless abuses stemming from scientific discovery have instigated. Equally, many religious zealots denounce the development of science by insisting that it negates the fundamental doctrines of their faith, even while continuously reaping the countless benefits of technological advancements and conveniences on a daily basis—which wouldn't otherwise exist if it weren't for the tireless pursuit of further scientific discovery.

In all of this dichotomous disorder and deception, these potent, dualistic weeds are a part of what I have repeatedly referred to as the *I'm-right-you're-wrong syndrome*. Even by thinking thoughts such as ***I'm right*** and ***you're wrong***, we distance ourselves from all else that exists by implementing such illusory labeling. These delineating divides peel away from our true nature of being one with everyone and everything.

By employing this mechanism of judgment, we mindlessly continue constructing additional machinations of inharmonious opposites in an already weed-infested world. While continually practicing thoughts that disguise, misrepresent, or rationalize away our true oneness with the entirety of existence, we perpetuate the compartmentalizing of what we recognize ourselves to be from the rest of so-called tangible reality. Nonetheless, said delusory processes constantly change from moment-to-moment, day-to-day, and year-to-year.

This weedy *crabgrass of creation* attempts to strangle each insight we might have of our truly divine unity. Furthermore, it spreads throughout the mind garden like a highly contagious pathogen with the sole purpose of breaking down and separating everything—destroying all of our true perceptions of oneness, balance, and divine love. And it will persist in doing so for as long as we buy into the sham.

However, if our underlying intentions and convictions persist in uncovering the veritable love within each of us individually and collectively, then balance can still be realized through our ongoing practice; and if those underlying practices have been focused on such ends for extended periods of time, then an immediate healing transformation can occur—at times, even instantly—as if it were all happening *in the twinkling of an eye*.

During the entire decade of the 1990s, a psychotherapist friend often would work in

[28] Also, the Tree of Good and Evil.

earshot of my teaching studio. On a rare occasion, he might overhear me raising my voice to a student who (for the moment) happened to be *acting out* in an exceptionally belligerent or rude manner. Such corrective measures were needed very infrequently; but when they were necessary, it would be only after I had made numerous attempts to alter the behavior with insistent yet long-suffering suggestions.

Immediately after a lesson, when one of these situations had just occurred, my friend came up to me looking quite confused and asked quizzically:

> I just don't understand.

I then replied:

> About what?

After a brief pause, he continued by saying:

> You raised your voice suddenly because your student was being so rude, and I thought you might actually throw him out of the house. Instead, you both burst out laughing and then he started playing the piano again—surprisingly much better than before!

Once I had described the entire incident to him in detail, we discussed how anger is capable of being a tool of love if we actually can let go of its *fire* when the *flame* is no longer needed. But choosing to lash back—merely out of our own annoyance—is a *reaction* to the problem rather than a *resolution*. Consequently, this sort of reaction only perpetuates the impending duality of ***anger versus non-anger*** as soon as we decide to retaliate instead of permanently rectifying the situation with a compassionate alternative.

In spite of everything, my student did apologize to me profusely in the end; only because after reprimanding him, I immediately asked him in a gentle and concerned manner why he had been behaving so poorly. This gave him a non-threatening invitation to open up; and he did so without hesitation.

Eagerly, the boy explained to me how terrible his day at school had been and how his mother began to nag him about doing his homework as soon as he got home. So once he arrived at his piano lesson about thirty minutes later, his final emotional response to all those other things building up for hours was to *detonate* in front of me—just because I happened to be the someone who was there when his internalized *logjam* could no longer be sustained.

By raising my voice, the sole intention was to stop a destructive course of action from further escalating out of control. My student already had been yelling about how much he despised the piano and hated me as well. He blurted out these uncharacteristic retorts immediately after I asked him to play a specific section of the music over again—one which he still wasn't getting right. Normally, he was eager to perform such an exercise and did so with added focus and conviction.

His true feelings were obviously diametric to those angry remarks he had just made, because he normally expressed how much he looked forward to his lessons with me. Yet, if I instead took his misconduct personally and kept harping at him to stop his rude remarks, he most likely would have retaliated with more of the same; and if I persisted barking at him for his unruly behavior, it would have been nothing more than insisting that his conduct was *wrong* and he needed to behave in the way that I prescribed, which was *right*. Consequently, it is very likely that such an aggressively dualistic response on my part would have provoked him into quitting the piano altogether—right on the spot.

The way I ultimately chose to handle this particular situation doesn't mean to say that every disagreement or volatile circumstance can be resolved in the same (or even similar) manner. It was a spur-of-the-moment decision that had to be made by detaching from my own personal feelings and potentially dichotomous reactions that those feelings could readily ignite.

In any situation that is starting to spiral out of control from any disagreement—spurring dualistic reaction after dualistic reaction—it is important to practice heightening our senses with empathy and genuine love (not just including our five physical senses, but with our more subtly enhanced sensory perceptions as well) in order to reestablish a manifestation of balance and harmony.

While *Granny M* was still alive, she used to recount stories of how my granddad would often use his heightened senses to anticipate a potentially volatile argument on the verge of erupting; and then, in the simplest and most disarming way imaginable, he would manage to mollify the situation by merely interjecting a seemingly unrelated and even startling statement—oftentimes, before any actual conflict had a chance to get underway between the others in the room.

Nearly a century ago, while in the midst of one such heated argument, my paternal grandfather reportedly intervened by letting out a big sigh and regurgitated these words

abruptly:

> I always knew that everyone is crazy except the three of us…[29]

On a few other occasions, he instead modified the statement above by exclaiming alternatively:

> Everyone in the world is wrong except the both of us.

But after either remark, he always enjoyed finishing it by adding his own little afterthought with a wink and a grin:

> And still you're just a little!

This was one of a variety of ways where he used a sudden interjection of mild humor to distract from and ultimately diffuse heated situations effortlessly and with compassion.

But without either love or empathy, such an assertion could also have been employed as a manipulative, dualistic devise—brushing off the opinions of others by implying that their views were wrong while reiterating (passive-aggressively) that his way was the only right one. Furthermore, it could have actually become more insidious than any initial disagreement because his insistence of being right was disguised and clouded by a dishonest semblance of jest. So, in whatever circumstances happen to be evolving, and whenever somebody's opinion is being challenged or disputed, we can always resort to putting down anyone by hiding behind the unfair, unloving, unreasonable, and ultimately dichotomous excuse of exclaiming:

---

[29] This was one of my grandfather's variations on the old adage:

> Everyone's crazy except thee and me.

And this phrase was occasionally added on to the preceding one:

> And thou art just a little!

We were only joking. Don't take everything so seriously!

In contrast, a markedly different and broader example of when instead of heightening our human perceptions, amplifying our awarenesses, and attuning our perceptions with divine love, many misguided factions of human society frequently have chosen to abuse their advantages of the moment and fall into further struggles between dualistic opposites. In one singular case out of countless others, an entire nation transformed itself into a radically different and untested social order, which instead of bringing about the Utopian world that its leadership had been promising to the populace, it devolved quickly into a ruthless and repressive society; and in most ways, the earlier tyranny and corruption simply transformed into another equally toxic reality).

Although, some of those who were initially inspired to eradicate the former brutal regime by transforming it into a governance guided by the tenets of integrity, equality, and justice, there were underlying dualities that nonetheless played both their irresistible and undeniable roles of turning at least some of those who were being subjugated into the subjugators, the powerless into the powerful, and the exploited into the exploiters. Of course, I am referring to the Marxist, egalitarian experiment that ushered in the early days of the USSR.[30]

However, the massive nation quickly unraveled into another brutal autocracy instead. Sadly, this was just one of a nearly unending parade of historical cases where rather than promoting a culture that could potentially cultivate, inspire, and direct individual and group sensibilities, perceptions, and beliefs into a condition of empathy, compassion, and an enduring intention towards manifesting a veritable common good, those who seized power from the former tyrants instead twisted their idealistic dreams ultimately into a despotic leadership that was as repressive and corrupt as the one it vanquished and replaced.

In George Orwell's novella *Animal Farm*, the author parodies this tragic transformation by satirically portraying Soviet society as a group of farm animals. This allegorical tale begins with all of the animals being horribly mistreated by a farmer and his family.[31] The abuse of those *enslaved* animals finally became so severe that their anger provoked them into driving the farmer off of his own property. Immediately, they created an animal society where one of

[30] The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was the official name for the Soviet Union and lasted from 1922–1991.

[31] The farm family represents the Romanov family dynasty, former Czarist rulers of Russia that were overthrown by the Bolsheviks—members of the extremist wing of the Russian Social Democratic party. They seized power during the Revolution of November 1917.

the chief maxims started out as being:

All animals are equal.

By removing the abusive humans from the picture, the supposed intention of all the animals was to create balance and harmony in a social order where everyone would be treated with the same decency and respect as was given to everyone else.

However, the pigs on the farm quickly proclaimed themselves as the most intelligent group of animals there. They devised a series of systematic subterfuges that were intended to undermine the initial aspirations of this animal *collective* by cleverly changing their original maxim into a nefariously conceived alternative:

All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others.

This revised decree was obviously intended to camouflage—yet facilitate—a subtle transfer of power and authority exclusively to the pigs. In the end, the farm became so completely under the domination of these *piggy* oppressors that all other animals could no longer distinguish between the physical characteristics, mannerisms, and tyrannical behaviors of the pigs and those of their original human masters.

The entire story is filled with multiple groups fighting constantly among themselves over who's right, who's wrong, who should obey, who should be obeyed, who should hold privilege, and who should have none. Unfortunately, the dichotomous seesaw continued swinging violently towards an almost immediate collapse into conflict and misery. Nobody in power truly discovered or developed any senses, sensitivities, or perceptions that could be used to alter their lives for the better and actually create a transformational shift into empathy and love.

This simple metaphor satirizes not only the souring aspirations of the Communist experiment in the former Soviet Union, but it likewise reflects the equally divisive transformations in many other governments and societies from earliest antiquity to the current day. Moreover, it reflects human social interactions in both a broad sense and on more intimate and personal levels as well. How many of us can remember instances in our own social circles of family and friends, workplaces, churches, and schools where similar or even identical situations have arisen in one way or another?

In the preceding story, we discussed how duality caused ongoing turmoil on an entire

societal level. But now, I will share an example of how the will to dominate and control can equally undermine and corrupt a close friendship as well. After all, friendship is merely a micro society not unlike a family, marriage, and other close associations in which we interact; and in all of the aforesaid examples (pertaining to both large groups and intimate ones alike), all such relationships can easily be thrown out of balance—thrusting them upon the dualistic seesaw once again—where divine love is not at the heart of the intentions, actions, and mindful practices of everyone who is a part of said affiliations.

Years ago, I used to frequent a local luncheonette where I became acquainted with a couple of the waitresses who professed to be best friends. One happened to be a single mother (abandoned by her former boyfriend) who was really struggling to raise her baby alone; and in contrast, the other waitress had a financially successful husband and tended tables at lunchtime solely to assuage the boredom that she continually experienced while her spouse was away at work. Both of these waitresses were always warm, witty, courteous, and efficient to all of their customers, so it didn't take very long before all three of us were behaving as though we had known each other all of our lives.

Although they often spoke of themselves as spiritual *sisters*, and their assertions actually seemed to hold true as they interacted with one another on a daily basis. Nevertheless, I began to detect an increasingly sizeable shift in the nature of their friendship during the several years that I knew them.

Even though they were obviously very close, their beliefs, values, and daily activities actually were about as different as they possibly could be. The wealthy housewife more and more came to work in expensive clothes, even if they were *only* her designer jeans and one of many imported silk blouses. Suddenly, high-end cosmetics came to complement a different pair of pricy shoes each day. She began spending a great deal of time and money at the beauty parlor and the local health club.

As time wore on, she and her husband started taking frequent vacations to many exotic destinations worldwide, and the pair of them unexpectedly joined a nearby country club to which they both had premium memberships. The various jewelry that she began wearing was most likely worth far more than several years' salary for the other gal; and she came to love showing off her late-model, high-end Cadillac (with custom interior) to anyone who was interested in admiring that ostentatious *gas-guzzler* at close range.

Of course, her car certainly had to be the most extravagant vehicle ever parked outside

the restaurant, and she often made a point of mentioning this in a loud voice so everyone in the place could be made aware of the fact. Through her ever-augmenting flamboyance, she obviously wanted to be seen as the dominant and superior one in her friendship with the other gal, although she never admitted that to anyone, especially herself.

In contrast, the single mom lived in a tiny, uninsulated upstairs apartment. It tended to be suffocating in the summer and freezing in the winter. She oftentimes expressed concerns for her baby having to be raised in such an unhealthy environment.

When arriving at work each morning, she would be dressed very simply, but as tastefully as her limited resources would allow. Her sparse wardrobe consisted mostly of items that were either given to her or acquired at a local second-hand shop. Before going home to care for the baby every evening, she had to juggle three jobs that took up sixty to seventy-five hours, six to seven days per week.

Understandably, there was neither time nor energy left for exercise. After all, the rest of each day had to be set aside for tending to her child, cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry at the laundromat several miles down the road.

I always considered her to be a lovely and attractive young woman, even though she had put on a good deal of weight after the breakup with her boyfriend. As she consistently greeted her customers with a convincingly genuine cheerfulness, enthusiasm, and vigor, very few people ever recognized how utterly sad and exhausted she actually had become over the past few years.

Rather than offering support and encouragement, the other waitress instead began teasing her mercilessly about her ever-increasingly large physical proportions. In addition, she kept saying that they should both go and work out at the gym together, even though she knew perfectly well that her friend neither had time nor money for such indulgences. Frequently, these types of remarks were jettisoned across the dining room so anyone present could hear everything that was being said.

Several times, I witnessed the single gal begging for an end to all of the unkind remarks and constant badgering. After all, when her well-to-do coworker occasionally called her *fatty*, *plumpkins*, *humpty-dumpty*, and *fatso* in front of customers, the jabs obviously were intentionally hurtful, even though the wealthy waitress insisted emphatically that she had done nothing wrong. Nevertheless, they regularly caused the single mom a great deal of pain and humiliation. But whenever she complained about her friend's inappropriate behavior, the other

woman simply would brush it off by replying flatly and predictably:

> Stop overreacting! You know I'm only joking.

This so-called *joking* quickly spiraled out of control. One afternoon, I had just arrived at the restaurant and was seating myself at the end of the counter when my favorite waitress turned towards me and said hello in a faint whisper. Her eyes were seriously swollen and tear-stained. When I asked what had happened, instead of offering a reply, she simply burst into a fit of uncontrollable sobbing.

Within the next several minutes, I gently persuaded her to tell me what made her so upset. As I suspected, the answer wasn't surprising. She had been tormented again by the other waitress, only this time it happened to be harsher than usual.

As soon as the coworker overheard our conversation from the other room, she quickly came in to defend her actions. Predictably, she began to say how she was only kidding and anyone could see that she meant no harm. After all, her friend needed to stop taking herself so seriously. It was at this point that I felt compelled to interrupt by saying:

> Isn't it true that you consider her to be your best friend?

Of course, she answered with an unequivocal *yes*. Then I continued:

> Well, if my best friend continually begged me to stop my joking because she didn't find it funny—but hurtful instead—I would apologize immediately and never do it again. It wouldn't matter whether or not I found her to be over-reacting. After all, this isn't about me but about the fact that I seem to be hurting my best friend; and as a good friend, I should never want to do anything to damage our friendship or to cause her any pain regardless of my opinion.

At hearing this, she became uncharacteristically quiet. Her face flushed with embarrassment as she left the room in silence. A few days later, I heard that she did apologize to her friend and discontinued the ongoing harassments.

Oftentimes, seemingly innocent thoughts, ideas, comments, or jokes can easily mutate unexpectedly into something senselessly rude or even damningly cruel. If we blindly accept such a transformation, we often continue justifying all of our subsequent, destructive actions to ourselves by coloring them somehow as being *right*, and the reactions from those we are hurting

as actually being *wrong*. The outcome unintentionally can flower into that dualistic *I'm-right-you're-wrong* scenario—which is veritably malignant—and only by stepping back and objectively observing our behavior mindfully (once again, by practicing the heightening of our perceptions through divine love) can we detect the true nature of what we unquestionably have manifested. It is exclusively through a practice of compassionate reflection and corrective action that further weeds might be prevented from proliferating.

This is true whether our relationship in question is one deemed as being a friendship, a family, a local community, or a far-reaching civilization. Although changing any or all such groups through divine love may seem implausible to most, their seeming impossibility is only maintained due to either our unwillingness (or ignorance) to change the way we practice thinking, believing, intending, and acting. As with anything else, this stipulation remains at the heart of whether or not a mind garden plot without weeds can manifest in each of both our individual and collective lives.

XIII.

Even more dichotomies to root out and dissolve...

At this juncture, I simply cannot refrain from repeating myself once again! There are those in the scientific community and the general public as well who adamantly reject all forms of spirituality, mystical perceptions, and religious beliefs and practices. The ideas of divinity, miracles, prophecies, visions, saintly interventions, illumination, salvation, enlightenment, angels, reincarnation, transmigration of souls (and the like) are claimed to have no basis in reality. They declare that all such notions tend to be founded solely on myths, delusions, hallucinations, subjective indoctrinations, and especially outright scams and not on objective substantiations.

Of course, in many instances these assertions have been proven to be true. However, to

discount all of the aforementioned areas of belief—especially when there has been so much evidence to support countless cases indicating that they do actually exist—has nevertheless been done frequently with the added influences of hearsay and personal bias. Consequently, hearsay and personal biases do not simply exist within the purview of those who advocate and believe in such specific, seemingly intangible aspects of our existence, but also within the opinions of those who tirelessly try to discount their validity as well.

After all, even proclaimed *scientific facts* also have been occasionally determined by prejudiced, personal perspectives—not being truly scientific at all. These dichotomies in science exist because many disputed issues haven't been founded exclusively on fact, but often have been grounded solely or partially by prejudiced opinions and personal motives. Moreover, if the scientific method isn't the basis for any pronouncement, or if the experiments designed are faulty or incomplete and the conclusions are jumped to or anticipated from a starting point formulated on subjective personal bias in the first place, then no true science ever existed in those instances.

A good example of this is found in the verbal assaults that physicist Alessandro Volta showered upon the works and findings of his rival Nikola Tesla. Another more current example of politics, popularity, and power outweighing and even negating the more purely motivated findings in science are recounted by Dr. Candace Pert in her popular book *Molecules of Emotion*:

> WINNING—it's the fuel that feeds the modern science machine. Being first with the facts is what we all strive for, but, even more, being first to publicly announce the results of the research in a top scientific journal—this is the big payoff. The history of science is loaded with tales of people who performed a "killer" experiment first, but were scooped in the eyes of their colleagues because a competitor made it into print before them.
>
> Boldness and self-confidence are the winning scientist's defining traits. The tendency to ponder over or repeat experiments endlessly are the hallmarks of a second stringer. When a paper is rejected, as is often the case for truly creative ones, it helps when the author is willing to carry on a scathing, Solomonic, or self-righteous defense by phone and fax with journal editors—while remaining polite, of course, with just a hint of superstar arrogance.

A further example also found in *Molecules of Emotion* is when Dr. Pert remembers certain personal incidents where similar dualistic conditions flourished. Here is the introduction to that

recollection:

> Science in the big leagues is a lot like what goes on up at the basket at the NBA play-offs: very competitive, with sharp knees and elbows flying hard and fast. As individuals vie fiercely for credit, everyone knows you have to take care of yourself, because no one else will. The exception, of course, is your scientific family, your collaborators, whose job it is to watch out for you, scratch your back, and see that you get a chance at the basket when it's your turn.
>
> While I found the game thrilling to play, I had not been sufficiently conditioned to accept the code of loyalty that it demanded. In a series of events that caused me much heartbreak and earned me much notoriety, I broke the rules and was dealt the cruelest of punishments, alienation from my scientific family. Later, in a popular book entitled *Apprentice to Genius*, Robert Kanigel would make a dramatic case for how I'd embarrassed a most royal medical dynasty, although this had never been my intention. In retrospect, I can see how my actions were part of a greater force at work to bring about a major shift from old-boy rule to a more egalitarian system.

When certain scientists have attacked a variety of beliefs and viewpoints as having no basis in reality at all, yet do not research their assertions and provide no conclusive experimental findings to back up their claims, then their proclamations are equally unproven and readily proliferate the *I'm-right-you're-wrong* duality. Besides, these types of remarks tend to express subjective and often reactive opinions and nothing more. However, these types of biased sentiments frequently are cloaked in a questionable shroud of slanted personal beliefs—viewpoints which the advocators would like us to accept as an incontestable truth from their own scientific *authority* regardless. This has occasionally been the case, even when there was no attempt of implementing any real science at all.

We frequently hear of these types of pronouncements regarding the seemingly impalpable—especially when it comes to spirituality and those who have witnessed any number of those elusive experiences considered to be *supernatural* or *paranormal* in nature. It isn't that these things are necessarily unquantifiable and therefore un-researchable; rather, few have discovered an appropriate way to examine and review certain types of intangibles including God, miracles, visions, spirits, extra sensory perceptions, reincarnation, and the like.

The American religious scholar Huston Smith[32] referred to these sorts of vague and incomplete assumptions made by some in the scientific community as *scientism* (or *metaphysical naturalism*) rather than being methodically drawn, factually based conclusions. Dr. Christopher M. Bache brusquely describes this condition further in his book *Lifecycles*:

> Scientism is bad science…While it may be sociologically true that many or even most persons trained in science affirm naturalism and do so with religious zeal, they have ceased to function as scientists when they do so. They have instead become philosophers, though usually offering no philosophical arguments for their assertions.

However, no matter what our own opinions have been about any of these contentions, it is undeniably true that each viewpoint entangled in this debate easily can fall within the parameters of the *I'm-right-you're-wrong* conundrum. Throughout the years, I have heard countless people unconsciously slip into this duality-producing mindset while forcefully defending their own point of view, whether or not it can stand up to valid scrutiny. This happens not only when the scientifically inclined condemn the religious and (conversely) when the religious vilify science. Moreover, it occurs when scientists or mathematicians dispute among themselves about theories, experiments, and subsequent solutions or proofs. And with equal fervor and insistence, religious scholars battle one another over the meaning of sacred texts.

Yet it doesn't end there. Musicians quarrel with musicians about performance practices, stylized nuances, and artistic interpretations; and then there are the cooks who can't stop fussing with each other over what would be the best recipe to use for baking tonight's croissants and dinner rolls.

Over the years, I remember discussing many times about how those I'm-right-you're-wrong skirmishes readily metastasize into insurmountable impasses (even when the participants in such activities seem to believe that they are actually crediting the same thing). In response to such speculations, I have heard the following remark stated wryly, more than once, and not without a certain sense of futility, self-righteousness, and even resignation:

> But everyone always thinks that they're right!

[32] According to *Wikipedia*:

> Huston Cummings Smith (born May 31, 1919) is a religious studies scholar in the United States. His book *The World's Religions* (originally titled *The Religions of Man*) has sold over two million copies and remains a popular introduction to comparative religion.

Keeping this in mind, even if any of us ever took the time to break down completely all of our own opinions and beliefs—comparing them accurately and in great detail with all others—we would actually discover that no one's individual principles or viewpoints are ever exactly the same as anyone else's (even if they are contended to be as such).

Even those who profess to concur one-hundred percent with other likeminded people, they can never do so from every angle. There are always nuances and subtle shades of varying distinctions that readily tempt each of us into believing illogically that we must be *more* right than everyone else with whom we allegedly agree. And since there is really nothing in existence that can actually measure the subjective and varying degrees of *rightness* or *wrongness*—which is somewhat of an oxymoron after all—we constantly are in danger of seeding more duality by falling back into the dichotomous trap of judging that our *rightness* always supersedes everyone else's systemic and pre-assumed *wrongness*.

Throughout the past several stories and illustrations, the *I'm-right-you're-wrong* duality was not the only cause for the discord and imbalance described therein, but it was merely the starting point for even a more endemic problem caused by the derivatives and variants potentially stemming from whenever we fall into thinking that we are correct and the rest of the world is in error. Here are just a few of the infinite possibilities for creating further weediness out of any such dichotomous assertions. Some of them were definitely at the heart of the difficulties found in those stories presented earlier—even though many were often subtle and underlying in nature, rather than being in the forefront of each situation.

Of course I am right and you are wrong, therefore:

1. *I see clearly yet you cannot.*
2. *My life is fortunate while yours is not.*
3. *I hold power but you aren't allowed.*
4. *I am lucky and you are unlucky.*
5. *My situation is superior yet yours is inferior.*
6. *I'm free to do as I please, but you must be subservient to others.*
7. *I am in control and you will never be in charge.*
8. *I can treat you however I feel, while you must accept it.*

If we actually take to heart all of these antagonistic interactions, then does truth, belief, certainty, reality, fact, proof, experience, incontestability, or irrefutable evidence ultimately provide anything more than being part of a pervasive, duplicitous mirage—even when some

sort of science is involved? Are they merely one antithetical side of that proverbial coin—or infamously dualistic seesaw—in an unending struggle with the opposite side?

In any form or degree of duality, there is no other likelihood of course. But when we become mindful enough to begin consciously removing those dichotomous weeds by the roots (and simultaneously *compost* their dualistic nature back into oneness and compassion), we instantly instigate a blossoming of our metaphorical flowers and a ripening of figurative fruits, vegetables, and herbs. This allows for the flourishing of divine love and all of its attributes.

Despite that everyone's opinions differ and each individual's viewpoints vary from all others, in the actuality of balance, oneness, and divine love there is no right or wrong, correct or incorrect, or even good or bad. Naturally, while we allow the weeds of duality to dominate the environment within the infinite landscape of our mind garden, these opposites certainly do thrive and appear to be not only omnipresent, but also seem to be the supreme law that rules over everything that exists. So while we continue to accept this condition as *reality*, we undoubtedly will find ourselves bound to the dualistic rules and consequences of any such realities—inconsistent and everchanging as they must continue to be.

But whenever we effectively maintain an uninterrupted practice of veritable kindness and compassion, those seemingly conflicting elements transmute into an actual, paradoxically miraculous, exceptional, and unifying diversity. Such extraordinary differences reflect nothing other than a sacred fluctuation between immeasurable variations of blessedness. Each of these divine divergences forms a unique petal upon a blooming bud of oneness or:

…the boundless blossoms emerging as an inimitable and infinite flowering of divine love.

With that said, what must we do when our lives seem threatened? How should we respond when we are being harassed, victimized, violated, bullied, abused, harmed, or when self-righteous others judge or condemn us wrongly—even when the facts are staring them right in the face? Certainly, there is no one-size-fits-all answer to this crucial issue.

It is essential to realize that in every moment dwells an accumulation of endless thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions practiced either consciously or unconsciously; and as these practices often have shifted and changed between this moment and every other moment (both past and present), the appropriate solution to all problematic situations also must be tailored specifically to those shifting thoughts and beliefs that have shaped each particular circumstance in question.

Realistically, no single blueprint or formula can work for everything, at all times. There is nothing that we can do other than develop a sincere and unrelenting willingness to practice balance, oneness, and divine love while we are discovering the unique and spontaneous solutions for life's challenges—one after another. This is one of the fundamental secrets of becoming a truly conscious gardener.

Such an assessment is valid not only for when others are about to do us harm, but it can be useful to apply to anything arduous or demanding ever confronting us. It might now be well to remember some of the instances recounted in earlier chapters of the book, including when I came face-to-face with that massive red wolf, when I was driving down the windy road on solid ice, or even when I found myself covered from head-to-toe in hornets.

However, if similar situations occurred to me in the future, it should be safe to say that I most likely couldn't expect to have identical outcomes simply by facing new situations in the same manner. Namely, if I came across another wolf once more, might I expect a perfectly wondrous and safe outcome simply by going right up to it, saying *hello*, and patting it vigorously on the head? Or, if I ever see another hornets' nest in the path directly ahead of me, would it be absolutely okay to stand on it while meditating for several minutes?

Furthermore, whenever I encounter in the future an ice-covered roadway descending along its winding path, should I never again think twice about the costs of attempting to drive down such a perilous stretch without facing the possibilities of great suffering and even death? In all likelihood, that probably would not be the best course of action.

We therefore should surmise that by always copying precisely any of our previous actions used successfully in the past to overcome our current challenges now (no matter how comparable or even identical those situations might appear to be), such reflexive responses ought to be seen as possibly unwise or even foolhardy without a truly mindful assessment. Just because a specific course of action happened to work out miraculously on one occasion doesn't guarantee that it will succeed again while facing seemingly similar situations in the future.

All sequences and combinations of thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, and beliefs practiced before we face anything new are totally different from all other progressions of thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, and beliefs that we have practiced at any other time. Therefore, how can we expect an identical, subsequent action always to have the same outcome when virtually everything else leading up that particular outcome is most likely changed significantly—whether or not we can actually identify or comprehend those differences?

Before proceeding any further, I wish to include one other noteworthy example that should never be used as an immutable template for what to do when and if any comparable situation might be forthcoming. To do so could potentially create a diametric and even deadly aftermath.

As I mentioned previously, my musical studies in Baltimore took place at the end of a turbulent period of racial unrest that consumed almost the entire decade of the 1960s while also overlapping into the early 1970s. During those troubled times, once dusk was about to descend upon the inner city every evening, the usually bustling, downtown streetscape transformed almost instantaneously into a panorama of a surreal metropolitan ghost town.

On a particularly chilly autumn evening, a friend and I decided to take a brief walk close to our school. The streets had quickly become devoid of nearly all human activity. We happened to be engrossed in a rousing musical discussion when my eyes caught a brief glimpse of some obscure activity almost two blocks ahead of us.

The streets in that particular part of town were poorly lit by outdated streetlights. But as we continued to amble closer, I was able to see the area in question somewhat more clearly. There were several, adjacent construction piles of cement blocks, lengthy pipes, lumber, and other materials intended for an apparent renovation project. There was one especially large pile spread across much of the sidewalk directly in front of a certain building where some of those materials were already being installed.

Amid the animated discussion with my classmate, I once again noticed some almost indistinguishable movement around this heap of mortar, metal, brick, stone, and timber. Before I had left my somewhat rural life for these new and unfamiliar surroundings in a big city, my parents had lectured me emphatically about always crossing the street to the opposite side whenever I noticed any suspicious *doings* ahead of me.

On any other occasion, I would have heeded their advice without hesitation, but I was so thoroughly distracted by our robust chitchat that I failed to alert my friend to a potentially hazardous situation (one which we were steadily approaching). Instead, I totally ignore the warning signals right before my eyes and continued to participate in our amicable, banter-filled debate. Even as we were less than a half-a-block away from that sizable obstruction blocking much of the sidewalk—and two large men came out from behind those stacks to face us directly—I seemed to have fallen out of mindfulness once again and ignored the possible danger looming immediately ahead.

There was a brief instant when I seemed to have snapped to my senses temporarily, but both of the men who briefly became visible were now gone once again. So for a fraction of a second, I actually was planning to take hold of my friend's arm and quickly lead us both across the roadway; but when those two guys vanished from sight, I instead sank back into my former state of comfortable oblivion.

Needless to say, my musical comrade and I were indeed walking blithely into a trap. Just as we were going to veer off of the sidewalk to circumnavigate the construction site, the two men suddenly popped out from behind one of the adjoining mounds of cement bags and stone while ominously raising a large metal pipe and a jagged piece of concrete to our heads. As this happened, they grabbed our arms and shoved us into a blind spot where no potential passersby could see any of their dubious deeds.

Immediately, they started manhandling us with forceful slaps and shoves to provoke us into a fight. As neither of us were inclined to respond in such a manner, they instead demanded that we empty our pockets. After grabbing my wallet and an expensive Swiss watch given to my friend by his apparently affluent father, the two hooligans began to quarrel over who was going to get what. Besides, the only cash residing in my wallet was a five dollar bill and three singles; and that gold wristwatch neither could be divvied up equitably between the two of them nor could it be immediately converted into cash.

While we watched our assailants argue over the uneven distribution of their spoils, the larger one suddenly turned and thrust his fist directly into my cheekbone. Fortunately, it wasn't too strong a punch; but then he came up to me so closely that his body bumped into mine. At that point, he glared down into my eyes and shouted:

What if we take yo' money and kill ya right now?

Although during another situation I might have reacted either more timidly or even with some ferocity, but on this particular occasion an enormous electricity filled my senses with utter calm instead. I gazed back at him and replied in soothing tones:

I don't think any of this will matter to us. After all, we'll be dead. But sadly, you're the ones who will suffer and pay in the end.

Astonished by my answer, both young men gasped in disbelief. Finally, the one standing directly in front of me looked more softly into my eyes and retorted weakly:

Whatcha just say?

While looking back into his face and listening to his faint words, I couldn't prevent a sudden wave of sadness from overwhelming me. So, from within an empathetic regard, I whispered dolefully back to him:

You **know** what I said.

Upon hearing this, they both stood there in stunned silence. My personal attacker unexpectedly handed over my wallet to me, gave back the watch to my friend, and both of us muttered our thanks in return.

After that, they split the money between them the best that they could and agreed to divvy it up more fairly later on. Afterward, they made one final though unconvincing threat:

If ya ever tell anyone about this, we's gonna come lookin' fo' ya.

I smiled faintly, nodded, and then agreed by saying:

I promise we won't.

After that, I asked him if we could go. He subsequently nodded back to me—but not without a hint of reluctance in his gesture. Nevertheless, my friend and I nodded to them just before hurrying back in the direction from whence we came.

As soon as we reached the end of the block and turned the corner, my body began to quiver so uncontrollably that my knees entirely gave way. Consequently, the rest of my body felt obliged to follow suit and completely collapsed onto the sidewalk. A few moments later, my classmate knelt down beside me and asked if I were okay.

Then, speaking to me in a somewhat bewildered tone of voice, he quietly asked how I remained so calm through it all. Immediately thereafter, he thanked me for getting us through such an ordeal and conceded how terrified he was—and further admitted to having felt as though we were both going to die.

In response, I simply stated that when I looked into their faces, each of them appeared to be so tragically lost that I couldn't feel any fear—even though my mind kept telling me to do so! As a consequence (or so it seemed), an overpowering feeling of commiseration allowed me to keep my composure. Even as I observed myself reacting in this peculiarly serene manner, I still couldn't help wondering why I was simply incapable of trembling in terror just like my friend

happened to be doing right alongside me.

After sitting upon the cold concrete for several minutes, we both began to shiver (but not due to our previous fears). A slick sheet of frost was visibly forming all over the sidewalk, and its pervading chill had now crept out of the pavement and up into our bones. Suddenly, there were no more words left to say, so we gratefully helped each other back onto our feet and slowly made the way home.

Each of four, weather-stiffened legs ironically seemed to transform instantly as they glided without effort across the darkening streets together. Those suddenly intuitive yet previously fragile pedestals of mortality now became our stalwart pathfinders. Once they stiffly stood upright, we immediately became their familiar loads again as they began transporting us back to the school dormitory with unexpected ease.

Incongruously, our senses also teemed with pensive, petrifying, and peaceful remembrances of the recent past. All at once, each recollection resonated voicelessly through those vacant, ghostly avenues, while even the fleeting twilight and its ever-expanding shadows encroached upon us all.

XIV.

Generating goosebumps…

In an article entitled "Wondering about Goosebumps? Of course you are", Robert H. Shmerling MD[33] describes a temporary change in the texture of skin tissue known as *goosebumps*. A snippet from that piece is cited below:

> They go by different names: goosebumps, goose pimples, goose flesh, and… goose

[33] Dr. Shmerling is a senior faculty editor and Editorial Advisory Board member for Harvard Health Publishing. His aforementioned article was published by Harvard Health Publishing on October 2, 2020.

> bumples. The medical term is *cutis anserine* (*cutis* means skin and *anser* means goose). I guess the similarity in texture is just too close to goose skin to ignore. Other medical terms for goosebumps are horripilation, piloerection, or pilomotor reflex.
>
> Each of these terms describes a temporary change in the skin from smooth to bumpy, most commonly developing after exposure to colds…

Shmerling continues by indicating that there are several other causes for goosebumps. These include emotions such as fear, excitement, and pride. In addition, I have often noticed myself how genuine awe can also incite them, such as when we experience an extraordinary sunset or ascend to a mountaintop where expansive panoramas reside. Equally, they can occur when we are so overwhelmed and inspired by profound works of music and art that we ultimately are *given the chills*. Shmerling further points out how many animals—including humans—raise their hackles whenever the fight or flight instinct is triggered, causing hair, fur, or quills to become rigid and stand up amid all of the hardening goosebumps supporting those various bodily outgrowths to rise above the body itself.

The phenomenon is normally thought to come about as an involuntary action. However, being someone who has experienced having goosebumps so often that they occasionally recurred hourly or even on a minute-by-minute basis, it eventually came clear to me that such episodes could essentially be repeated intentionally when utilizing an appropriate method of conditioning.

But before addressing how we might develop the ability to manifest goosebumps and/or emotionally produced *chills* on command, I first would like to address how they frequently triggered and accompanied the increase in my sense of awareness about various aspects of my life. Throughout this volume, I have described numerous circumstances where seemingly unusual phenomena presented themselves to me; and whether or not it was also mentioned, the truth of the matter was that each of those incidents almost always were preceded and/or accompanied by my having goosebumps, intense *chills* of elation, or both. This included every time when those magnetic, unseen *hands* (which I mentioned at various moments throughout the book) appeared to touch me physically while guiding me away from danger, directing me almost instantly into an unexpected windfall, or being the pivotal moment when my then-current state of affairs almost would improve noticeably step-by-step.

Over the years, I have heard from countless individuals about their own comparable

experiences and am certain that there is also an anonymous multitude of others who share in these types of occurrences as well. But because of their personal misgivings and fears about being labeled as someone who is delusional or crazy, they almost invariably refuse to admit to anyone else about such things ever transpiring in their lives.

Throughout my childhood and adolescence, aside from listening to music at home or studying and playing an assortment of instruments, I also had the good fortune of attending some great musical performances—including countless solo and chamber music recitals, orchestra concerts, ballets, operas, and other sorts of presentations as well. Consequently, like so many other young aficionados and devoted students of classical music, I soon became intimately acquainted with goosebumps and chills of emotion—especially when the music I happened to be either playing or listening to was especially captivating and profound.

As my understanding increased about how to play in more inspired and inspiring ways, I realized that goosebumps and chills were not just the result of performing extraordinary works of music (or simply listening as a bystander to something truly wonderful), but they could also trigger a further mesmerizing and chill-producing state within myself—whereby I instantly could play with even more insight and intensity. Consequently, I discovered that profound music not only caused goosebumps to occur as an emotional *response* to hearing captivating and powerful music, but any preliminary goosebumps that I might have engineered (before any music actually began) were also capable of inciting me to fulfill even more beautiful performance results.

Decades ago, I was describing to groups of both amateur students and serious musicians how to augment further the intensity of their performances merely by shifting their mental and emotional state while playing. If this were done with proper intentions, there was also a good chance of their being able to generate chills and goosebumps almost instantly—before, during, and after actually playing.

There have always been many performers who have found themselves doing this as a normal part of how they made music, without ever considering how or why they were able to do it. But there have also been those who seemed to shift the intensity of their playing only occasionally, even randomly, in an inconsistent manner (only sometimes being able to bring about the desired impassioned state within themselves for goosebumps and chills to occur) so they weren't usually aware of how they actually could do it as well. And then, there are perhaps the majority of individuals who have never experienced any goosebumps at all—either as an

active participant while performing, or even as a passive listener nearby.

Yet, such a transition into having goosebumps would allow them more likely to experience for themselves (while possibly transmitting to others) the genuine *chills* of inspiration and wonder. Normally, this worked more often when their playing had already reached a fairly advanced stage of expressiveness and technical competency and if their deliberate attempt to create goosebumps didn't distract or detract from the overall performance. After all, this conscious implementation always had to be an enhancement to making music rather than a distraction or a detraction from doing so.

To keep my portrayal of the process from seeming too *weird*, complex, or unattainable for my students, I half-jokingly referred to it as my *goosebump-technique*. Consequently, this ostensibly offhanded nickname stuck and was gradually adopted by numerous students over the years.

Obviously, there have always been musicians throughout the centuries who have been able to move themselves and others into such heightened emotionalized states so as to produce goosebumps, chills, and even the shedding of tears. Yet, they didn't necessarily accomplish these types of responses through any intentionally planned procedure.

Instead, those who have discovered in themselves enough *electricity* to produce goosebumps quickly (as a result of attaining highly emotionalized and/or emotionalizing states) were likely to be passionately *charged* individuals to begin with—those individuals who never had to think about further *practicing* inspiration as some sort of conscious, daily routine. It simply wasn't necessary because they naturally gravitated towards inspiring others and being inspired themselves as a normal part of their musicmaking (and most likely, a part of other aspects of their lives as well). It is possible that they unconsciously *practiced* these capabilities over and over again from a very early age—eventually being able to associate the occurrence of goosebumps, chills, and tears of elation with whenever they brought about the appropriate shift in their performance to a more sensitized and sensitizing state of being.

Frequently attempting to teach inexperienced players the ability to express music with intense feelings (without those expressed feelings being allowed to interfere with the actual execution of every musical note being performed), there have always been a wide variety of ways that teachers used to motivate their students into heightened expressiveness of the works they were preparing to play. Various versions of this approach have been utilized for centuries.

However, to bring out their deepest emotions while playing, music-makers often had to

invoke those feelings through the use of imprecise, poetical descriptions and mental imaginings. Master musicians and music coaches would either speak or even shout out some sort of imagery-provoking language just before a student was about to play, and even while said student was in the middle of performing.

Here is a sample of some phrases that teachers have used—oftentimes conveying them with a suitably emotive tone of voice—to convey further the types of feelings their students needed to feel, understand, and express:

Sing the music!
Let it soar!
Let it laugh!
Let it dance!
Let it thunder!
Let it shimmer!
Let it sparkle!
Put your heart into it!
Bring out the passion!
Be sensitive!
Be delicate!
Expose your soul!
Let the tears flow!
Show us your heart!
Spill your guts!
Make the melody wail!
Feed the fire!
Feel the passion!
Bring out the light!
Let God speak through your hands!

And then there were the innumerable comparisons teachers might make between achieving the intense, goosebump-producing feelings in the music that students were attempting to express with the equally intense sensations that occur while anyone is experiencing various aspects of

sexual passion and orgasmic love.

When I was younger and heard a couple of music coaches shout out such descriptions, their words often triggered in me a heightened awareness of how to inject ever-increasing passion into the music I was playing—long before I actually experienced firsthand some of those things about which they were calling out for me to feel. Needless to say, the musical results I subsequently produced were not always as exacting or long-lasting as when I evolved into a more mature performer in subsequent years.

In addition to all of this, I eventually discovered that aside from continually emotionalizing my playing while in the midst of a performance, it was equally important in preparing myself to enter an emotionalized state of focus and concentration ahead of actually beginning to play—feeling those goosebumps and chills of inspiration before the first notes in any performance were ever allowed to occur. Therefore, as emphasized earlier, it was really useful for goosebumps and chills (and the emotions they represented) to be already present before any music ever began. It was crucial for them to enhance the music just about to be played rather than simply being merely a response (or reaction) happening after the fact.

Whatever descriptive words, thoughts, or images we might have chosen as the verbal and/or mentally visualized catalyst for shifting our perceptions instantaneously—if each player's ultimate reaction to any such command contained enough of the required impetus to do so—then all subsequent chills and goosebumps would bring about an immediate elevation of impassioned emotions while playing. In some instances, emotionally charged, synesthesia-producing responses (manifesting vibrations and colors in a nearly *tangible* form) could accompany and amplify the intensity of goosebumps and chills. Regardless, the presence of any or all of these phenomena can regularly inspire both performer and audience alike.

Pertaining to my own students, some were already familiar with experiencing goosebumps whenever their playing would reach a truly profound level of expressiveness. However, it was often something that seemed to come and go for many of them in a haphazard and inconsistent manner; and it was frequently seen as a reaction to hearing the beautiful music they were in the midst of playing rather than their being an actual *conscious producer of beauty* instead—intent on waking up and/or further enhancing any preexisting beauty.

In contrast, there were also several students who had never experienced any goosebumps or chills in their entire lives, even those who were already quite accomplished

players. Consequently, they were inclined to perform without any underlying emotional *spark* in their playing at all, regardless of how much technical and cerebral proficiency had previously been accomplished. Accordingly, in order for them to establish a proper mindset for generating goosebumps on their own, I would give them a series of descriptive instructions so they might be better equipped to fulfill the task.

In more recent years, I found that such preparations greatly enhanced not only musicians and their musical performances but could also amplify and augment the results of a variety of other important endeavors in which anyone might also be engaged. They even included our ability to beneficially transform our meditations, our prayers, our affirmational recitations, and even the most routine and mundane of our regular chores into increasingly rapturous and transformational aspects of living.

Whether I would be speaking to music students in the studio, friends congregating for a meal, or to total strangers (while hiking in the wilderness, on a nearby village street, or in the midst of a bustling city hundreds of miles away from home), the following description below is a sampling of what I might have said to any of them about consciously creating goosebumps and similar transformational shifts in the body. With these suggestions, they were more aware how they might increase their ability to inspire, be inspired, and ultimately uncover the ever-present radiance that lies all around us at any given moment:

> *The first thing for us to do is to find somewhere to sit, lie down, stand, or stroll peacefully, comfortably, and quietly, breathing slowly and deeply while relaxing fully—just as we would do when preparing to meditate in any fashion. After taking a few moments (or even several minutes) to accomplish this, then the next step is to create a state of mind that brings us into a sense of joy, inspiration, wonder, and even radiance—allowing ourselves to feel waves of electricity surging throughout the entire body.*
>
> *I have found that visualizing, saying quietly (or silently), or simply thinking of anything that has deeply moved us in the past can possibly aid us in allowing goosebumps and/or chills to manifest quite readily. It is important not to attempt to force either of these conditions to occur. Instead, when they do happen to immerge, they should do so naturally—totally by themselves—without our trying to force them in the slightest way. Rather, they can be gently*

persuaded to manifest by our quiet, inspired imaginings instead.

We might simply focus on envisioning the most beautiful, luminous, loving, or impassioned experiences in our lives. If none come to mind, then fill ourselves with the sense of being brightened by a brilliant light bringing us gladness and delight. Feel the thrill of elation as we visualize ourselves in wondrous situations: standing on a mountaintop, looking over vast panoramas in every direction, experiencing thunderous waves crashing upon the shoreline, entering a cathedral with uplifting music resounding throughout, or experiencing anything else we can think of that could possibly electrify our thoughts, our feelings, and our body. This can include even affecting the subtle surface of our skin, so that any of these visualizations might generate goosebumps or chills so as to ignite within us a heightened sense of joy. And above all else, we should encourage these sensations of wonder by keeping our lips raised faintly upward into a slight "semi-smile" in affirmation of this anticipated delight.[34]

XV.

Shifting good luck, beginner's luck, and lucky streaks into enduring displays of blessedness...

How many of us remember those times when we really wanted to participate in some sort of recreational, professional, or creative activity (often requiring a fair amount of skill) that we never had the chance to try out previously? But when we were eventually able to have a go at it, instead of floundering about amateurishly in our brand-new pursuit, we quickly embraced

[34] In some studies that have been done to see if smiling actually can assist in making us happier, oftentimes the results have indicated there was no conclusive evidence how this (in fact) could be the case. Nevertheless, extensive, long-term practice indicates results to the contrary. I will address this topic—including why utilizing a *semi-smile* is preferable to employing a broad smile—in more depth later in the chapter.

the activity with surprising ease; and it seemed as though we had been doing it all our lives. That is to say, we suddenly showed inexplicable aptitude that was never expected of or associated with any beginner. Unfortunately, our serendipitous moment of accomplishment was short-lived and evaporated nearly as quickly as when our seeming *mastery* materialized in the first place—leaving us as only the bumbling newcomers that everyone (including ourselves) expected us to be.

Of course, this is a typical scenario for anyone who has ever experienced beginner's luck. One of the most memorable times when it happened to me was at the end of summer just before I headed off to college for the first time.

Ever since I was a young teen, I always wanted to try my hand at bowling. But my mother was dead set against it and complained that it was a total waste of time and money—possibly having to do with one of her sister's lifelong obsession with the game. Consequently, she would never let me go to the bowling alleys, not even when my schoolmates offered to take me and pay for the outing themselves.

But despite all of her insistences—just before I was about to go off to music school a couple of months after high school graduation—three of my classmates decided to spirit me away to the local bowling alley under the pretense that they were giving me a surprise party. They were planning to take me out to celebrate my eighteenth birthday coming up in a few weeks. Since each of us would already be at college by that time, this would be the last opportunity for us to get together before Christmas vacation in December.

When they finally told me where we were going that day, I was overjoyed to find that they were actually taking me bowling. As I knew almost nothing about the game itself, they had to run me through the motions of how to play step-by-step. After giving me a brief introduction of the rules, how to score, and some pointers about how to hold, aim, and release the ball, we went through an entire practice round before starting in with a real game.

The run-through was fairly predictable. I hit very few pins and frequently the ball would fall into the gutter on either side of our assigned lane. From there, the ball would be forced down one of those hollowed-out gutters, preventing the ball from hitting any of the pins, and subsequently scoring no points at all. Certainly, none of my friends ever expected me to perform any better than this. I was a rather unathletic beginner after all—spending my days sitting for hours in front of a piano keyboard practicing.

Nevertheless, once my friends decided that I was ready to try my hand in an *official*

game, something completely unexpected happened. The level of excitement I began experiencing while finally getting to bowl with three of my best friends started to increase exponentially. A mesmeric sense of delight inundated me from within. Jolts of electricity continually surged across my body while leaving clusters of goosebumps in their wake; and for lack of a better way to describe how I felt at the time, it were as though I had been vigorously jolted into some inexplicable state of fortuitous delight—which also indicated to me (with an inimitable sense of knowing) that my ability to throw bowling balls was seriously about to change.

Immediately, after I rolled the next ball down the lane, it swiftly knocked over all of the pins in a decisive *strike*[35]. Then, during the next several frames, I rolled five more strikes, much to the amazement of everyone watching nearby. Our little band of high-school friends kept bursting into cheers after every strike that I made. We also fell into uncontrollable fits of laughter while leaping and twirling about—rejoicing in my surprising and happy change of *luck*.

Eventually, people who were bowling in nearby lanes began noticing the raucous commotion emanating from my companions and me and immediately got caught up in our contagious outbursts of merriment. Consequently, dozens of other people started cheering me on every step of the way; and within minutes, much of the entire establishment was in an uproar—focusing all attention on each subsequent throw I made.

Once the game was completed, everybody in the house began urging me to play another game right away. However, since I was a terribly self-conscious kid in most public situations, my mood soon changed almost automatically. While every bowler's eye was now set upon me, I quickly became self-conscious and extremely nervous; and when I made the next toss of the ball, I lost my balance completely and threw it jerkily into the gutter. Once again, the ball wobbled past all the pins without landing a single point.

When that happened, the entire crowd instantly gasped and exclaimed with disappointed voices:

Aw, what a shame…

Nevertheless, when I stood again in front of our appointed lane (getting ready for my next throw), boisterous cries of encouragement rang throughout the entire building again. Even people eating at the far-off snack bar were shouting out their support. Consequently, my focus

[35] In bowling jargon, a strike is when all ten pins are knocked down with a single roll of the ball.

returned; and not only did I hit a few of the pins but actually made another strike. The whole place exploded in more amicable chaos. Aside from the deafening cheers, many people actually started applauding enthusiastically.

Of course, I found all of this undue attention starting to rattle me once more, and so yet another gutter ball was consequently thrown by me immediately thereafter. In all of my upcoming rolls during this new game, the same thing continued to happen:

> *First, I would produce a gutter ball. Then, a strike would follow directly as a seeming counterbalance. This happened over and over again.*

In fact, by the middle of the game, dozens of bowlers started chanting just before the next gutter ball was anticipated to come bobbing down the lane:

GUTTER, GUTTER, GUTTER, GUTTER BALL!

And equally, when it appeared once more as the appropriate time in this bizarre sequence of good and bad throws for me to produce yet another expected strike, their hopefully prophetic outcries of *yay* and *that-a-boy* persisted while this massive cheering squad spontaneously bellowed out:

STRIKE, STRIKE, STRIKE, STRIKE, STRIKE!!!

By the time my closing strike made its appearance at the end of the game, everyone joined together in complete abandon. Deafening hurrahs and irrepressible laughter infiltrated each tiny fragment of idle space within that massive room.

Total strangers were hugging, smooching, dancing, and bounding about together. Even a cluster of nearby bowlers began to form around me to tousle my hair, squeeze my shoulders, slap me on the back so hard as to nearly knock me over, and ensnare me in an unwanted succession of overly enthusiastic bearhugs. Along with such rambunctious displays of comradery, my entire face had also been wetted by sloppy kisses—laced with the redolence of stale beer, booze, and cigarette odors blended jarringly together.

The entire affair was absolutely unpredictable and wild—far beyond what might be expected in any situation such as this. But paradoxically, it was also really fun and carefree. Without a question, this odd interlude with a bunch of friends and strangers had to be one of the most unanticipated and happy moments of my teenage years.

Once the adrenaline of the crowd started ebbing away, a bunch of my newfound companions begged me to play one more game possibly to prolong the festive atmosphere for just a while longer. Some of them even offered to pay for it. However, I had become terribly exhausted and sensed that my lucky streak had also run totally out of steam (since those electrifying goosebumps and chills covering my body earlier had completely evaporated). Indeed, they now were gone without a trace.

Nonetheless, I did try to play several more frames anyway; but instead, the outcome was absolutely poor once more. There were no other fortunate flukes popping up to override my true and total lack of any bowling skills. In other words, the magic from this particular stint with beginner's luck had instantly vanished.

After having experienced a wide variety of situations where this form of unexpected good fortune affected me so many times in the past, I came to realize the presence of noticeable, recurring patterns whenever my ostensible beginner's luck would begin and when it would come to an end. It almost always started sometime after my deep yearning to do something, have something, or for something to happen—and usually doing so for a fair amount of time beforehand—as those yearnings of mine also tended to be accompanied by a great deal of excitement, fervor, and joyous expectation. But when any doubt, worry, impatience, pessimism, or fear infiltrated my thoughts, then my beginner's luck always came to a regrettably premature end.

Aside from the many other experiences of beginner's luck (or initial, short-lived lucky streaks) similar to this one, there were also dozens (if not hundreds) of instances when I repeatedly experienced recurring *lucky streaks* long after any periods of beginner's luck might have first appeared. Recounted below is such a case, though it wasn't necessarily among the more remarkable streaks I ever had. Nevertheless, it certainly was one of the most memorable. This is probably because it was the earliest streak that I still can remember clearly.

It came about when I was at the annual firemen's carnival in our nearby village. Because my father had always been an active volunteer in the company sponsoring both the carnival and a parade earlier in the day, we always went to watch him marching in the afternoon and often attended the carnival later in the evening. But once my dad became permanently disabled from his near-fatal accident in the early sixties, he no longer participated in either the parades or the carnivals.

As a young kid, I absolutely loved both events, especially the carnival at night. When I was very little, my favorite booth at the carnival had a huge, multi-colored wheel with numbers on it. Anyone could place bets on one or more of those numbers—also appearing on a counter in front of the booth—by placing a coin over the desired numbers. When a person's coin was on the same number that was also selected by the wheel just as it stopped spinning, then a prize would be awarded.

Even at a very early age (before I was tall enough to look at the numbers spread across the narrow counter), my dad would pick me up so I could see all of those numbers clearly. Then he always asked me what the lucky number was going to be; and immediately thereafter, he then placed his coin on the spot that I had selected.

Those instances in my dad's arms were among the first times when I clearly remember feeling intense goosebumps right before picking a winning number. In nearly every instance when those goosebumps occurred, my chosen numbers always became winners, and my father proudly allowed me to select a prize from the *prize shelf* in the back of the booth.

However, he never permitted me to play more than one or two games at a time, so I never really experienced having a bona fide, long-lasting *lucky streak* until years later during my high school years when I placed numerous bets consecutively on my own. Regardless, when I played from the arms of my father, all of his buddies in the fire department who were tending the booth at the moment regularly joked with him by referring to me as his *lucky charm*.

That always made him beam with pride, but that's where it ended. After all, no one in my immediate family were of the gambling sort.

Following those early instances, I eventually did learn nonetheless to associate goosebumps with unexpected waves of good luck that were soon about to happen. Such *lucky streaks* simultaneously produced within me sensations of great happiness while also being able to select winning number after winning number again and again. However (in due course), I came to notice that as soon as the feelings of certitude and joy waned as I became exhausted for the moment, then I realized it was time to put my luck on hold. Then my goosebumps and luck would both immediately subside until the next opportunity for that *lucky streak* and its corresponding symptoms of goosebumps were ready to reappear.

After a few subsequent years passed by, the town carnival suspended all of its betting wheels and replaced them with other carnival games. My father wanted me to try my *luck* with the other games, but I never experienced the *electricity* from them like I did with those big,

colorful, numbered spinning wheels. Consequently, I rarely won anything without having my favorite wheels being present. Oddly, that was always the only place at the time where I could expect my lucky streak to reactivate itself.

The next situation that further demonstrated that point was during one of my summer vacations in the middle of high school. A neighbor lady stopped by and invited my brother, sister, and me to go to the carnival with her and her young kids that very night. She offhandedly mentioned to my mother how several booths with betting wheels were being reinstated.[36]

As soon as she spoke about those numbered wheels, a jolt of electricity shot through me, generating a multitude of goosebumps all over my body for several minutes. Once the lady was about to walk back to her own house, I rushed up to her excitedly—still being affected by goosebumps, chills, and feeling truly overjoyed—the following words blurted uncontrollably from my lips with surprising conviction:

I'm going to win big tonight. I feel really lucky!

This impassioned statement took our neighbor totally off guard, so she looked at me for several moments not knowing what to say. But after regaining some semblance of composure, she gave me a quizzical glance and replied in a hesitating (if somewhat patronizing) manner:

That's nice…

Later on, she came by our place in the evening and drove all of us to the park where the carnival was already in full swing. She asked me to mind the other kids while she finished up with a short errand down the road.

So I directed all of my younger charges over to where the wheel games were going on and asked each of them which booth had the prizes they liked the most. After a brief discussion, we unanimously chose one having the greatest selection of stuffed animals, along with a diverse assortment of various other prizes as well.

From my babysitting money, I decided to convert three-dollars-worth into twelve quarters. Since each number betted upon was only twenty-five cents at the time, it allowed me

[36] If memory serves, there were a few years when the wheels were banned from the carnival because of a new law having just passed—one which considered all wheel games to be a form of gambling. Consequently, they no longer could be played in places where minors were permitted.

However, the law was eventually repealed, since the prizes were toys and other non-cash items; and the event was a charity fundraiser sponsored by the fire department. Fortunately, that was why I could once again play the games as an underaged high schooler.

to play for twelve possible prizes. By the time our neighbor found all of us again about ten minutes later, I had already won twelve times in a row and had been covered with goosebumps for the entire stretch while playing. Moreover, as I placed each of those bets, the lucky numbers simply stood out noticeably for me to select. They essentially shone brighter than any other number as it actually seemed to *vibrate* visibly to me.

Once having spent each of those quarters, I was thoroughly exhausted and then all of the electricity in my body was also spent. But by the time that apparent lucky streak was suspended again for the time being, I had won prizes for my brother, my sister, myself, and each of our neighbor's kids. Moreover, I also got something for both my parents, a gift for our neighbor and her husband, for a few young bystanders.

Aside from all of those, there was an enormous, jumbo-sized stuffed bunny I won for a sweet little girl who stood next to me. She began sobbing uncontrollably and told me how all her attempts to win a little bunny rabbit were for naught, and now she had no more quarters to try again.

When I heard her story, my goosebumps seemed to reignite with an unanticipated chill of elation as they also gave me a sense of certainty, clarity, and a buoyancy beyond anything that I had felt before—despite the fact that I was totally tired and ready to put my streak back on hold until the next opportunity presented itself.

However, after hearing so much sadness in the girl's voice, I cheerfully asked if she would like me to win something nice for her? So she instantly stopped blubbering, her eyes looked up to meet mine, and with newfound hope she said in a soft voice filled with encouragement:

You can?

And amid a burst of joyful laughter, I called out confidently:

Of course I can!

That assertion was something I never expected to blurt out—especially in the presence of those many bystanders surrounding us. Moreover, I instantly wondered if I had lost my mind by announcing such a thing. Nevertheless, I reassuringly took her by the hand and brought her just a few steps closer to face that big, colorful wheel of numbers.

Then, I gave her my last quarter, gently picked her up in my arms, and finally pointed to the place where she should place the coin in its presumably *lucky* spot on the counter. This all

seemed so familiar to me as my mind suddenly flashed back to when my own father used to take me in his arms and allow me to place coins on similar counters years earlier.

All of the expectant onlookers became breathlessly silent once the wheel began to spin. After twirling speedily round and round for countless seconds, it eventually slowed down and finally came to a much anticipated halt. Once the crowd came to recognize that our number had just won, they instantly burst into enthusiastic applause.

But simultaneously, an additional realization came to all of us as well. Not only did the wheel eventually land on our selected number (making it the winning one), but our lucky choice was also lined-up with the only big, bright star on the wheel—indicating our prize could be any of the magnificent grand prizes displayed prominently on the highest shelf.

So, when I explained this to the young girl, her eyes went wide and glistened brightly as a broad smile began to stretch across her pretty face. In the end, she didn't get the little bunny she was initially hoping for; but instead, she selected the beautiful, pastel-colored, jumbo bunny that was at least two times larger than she was herself.

After the booth manager climbed up his ladder to bring down the magnificent, Harvey-sized rabbit and passed it over the counter to the child, everybody started laughing with delight. When the huge bunny was placed right in front of the little human *bunny* standing beside me with her mouth agape, it was plain to all those who were close-by that the rabbit's proportions clearly overshadowed those of the little girl's by a sizeable amount; so when she attempted to pick it up and carry the fluffy beast back through the crowd to show her parents, it simply wasn't possible for her to do so by herself.

Consequently, her dad soon broke away from the enthusiastic onlookers, exclaimed how wonderful was her unexpected *souvenir*, smiled gratefully at me, and picked up the bulky critter. Then, with his daughter in tow, they walked merrily into the crowd again to join the rest of their family.

As I said earlier, there were many times when my good friend *lady luck* suddenly made countless other appearances in my life. They in fact took place both before and after this incident transpired at the carnival—manifesting in the form of beginner's luck in new, untried ventures, extended lucky streaks, and many other onetime situations that certainly could also be considered very *lucky*.

Over the course of many years, I frequently *sensed* the imminent arrival of good luck into my life soon before a semblance of anything obviously lucky actually happened, because

the goosebumps and chills of elation almost always preceded the surprising good fortune that I inevitably would receive soon thereafter. This even occurred before something potentially crucial was about to harm me physically or possibly even jeopardize my life. But when clusters of those goosebumps popped up all over me unexpectedly, things that were about to go sour suddenly would shift into something else perplexingly beneficial, inspiring, and even life-saving.

Likewise, there were still other times when the appearance of goosebumps were simply precursors to things inexplicably joyful while my whimsical *benefactress of luck* was about to bestow upon me awe-inspiring marvels repeatedly. But after experiencing hundreds of such memorable instances, I finally came to realize that all of these incidents (albeit, appearing as either brief or extended surges of *spine-tingling* electricity) were not the harbingers of imminent *good luck* as I previously assumed that they were.

Instead, after developing something akin to my initial sense of having a *mind gardener's* perspective about the world—in which we appear to be existing—I started to consider them as being much more than mere announcements of good luck soon to manifest before me. Indeed, they were no longer simply the indicators of my current dualistic position on a *cosmic seesaw* shifting from its negative end back to the positive face of duality once again.

If I could only understand those ostensibly recurring shifts from the viewpoint of a truly mindful and conscious gardener, then my so-called luck would no longer just be some sort of temporary fluke of fortune that seemed to come and go haphazardly. On the contrary, it instead could become a part of the seesaw's fulcrum of balance, from where any of us could truly escape this seesaw's perennial bouncing and swinging altogether. For when divine love (the genuine means for the dissolution of duality to occur) should manifest instead of our lifelong, seesawing fluctuations, then those temporary shifts from good luck to bad might actually transmute into something more blessed and permanent.

Most of us are taught to cling to a set of well-practiced, limited, and limiting beliefs from the time of our infancy onward. They have posed continuously as the sole seeds for our unconditional acceptance of endless struggles with misfortune, despair, disaster, and eventual death in our outer world of so-called *reality*. Yet, once we probe into an interior direction as well, rather than just judging our place in corporeal existence from a seemingly *palpable* and *external* viewpoint, we can discover an unlimited supply of grace-filled, transformational *seeds* existing *within* us at all times.

Such a shift in our perceptions not only can provide mere glimpses of who and what we

actually are (by offering us transient tastes of good fortune in the guise of beginner's luck, a continuation of any initial luck with momentary and random strokes of further good luck, and even times when we experience lengthier godsends in the form of *lucky streaks*), but it can also manifest as a veritable unfoldment of those otherwise undetectable miracles all around us—once we disengage from the shadowy veils of duality while experiencing a life forever brimming with eternal possibilities of blessedness.

XVI.

A simple method for transmuting weeds into wonders...

One of the chief themes recurring throughout this work has underscored how whenever we think, intend, or act dualistically, the outcomes will either yield beneficial results temporarily through our alleged, *positive* practices or a set of conversely destructive and undermining consequences manifesting from our *negative* habits—whether they have come about intentionally, reflexively, or seemingly *by accident*.

For example, physical exercise or lack thereof boosts or diminishes our body's capacity to perform optimally. Similarly, mental and spiritual enhancements or neglect will also produce corresponding effects. However, as with all that exists in duality, any of said outcomes will simply reveal only a transient upshot (either lasting for an instant, an hour, a day, a year, a lifetime, an eon, or any other finite measurement in time) until those temporarily prevailing tendencies begin to favor an opposing and contrary manifestation instead—all being a part of that proverbial cosmic seesaw rocking ceaselessly back and forth.

As has already been mentioned on multiple occasions herein, the only way we can transform all positives and their perpetually combatting negatives into a genuinely balanced

state of *non-dichotomous oneness*[37] is to practice our thoughts, beliefs, intentions, and subsequent actions in a conscious manner as ever-present attributes and manifestations of divine love.

But in order for us to understand how to go about actually amplifying and attuning our awarenesses so fully as to discern whether or not we are truly devoid of dualistic illusions, it is vital to identify and weed out those antagonistic influences struggling against their supposed *opposites* in our lives and within our minds. Ultimately, it is essential for us to awaken said abilities inside of ourselves that can recognize and resolve the exhaustingly futile contests as soon as we can—even before they have the opportunity to take hold in a lasting way. Through utilizing the procedures of meditation, prayer, and the reciting of affirmations effectively, we can commence with the conscious practice of disengaging with duality once and for all. But before we can accomplish this, it is necessary to consider the following poser:

HOW?!?

After decades of searching, it finally dawned on me in what way I might enable such a transformational shift. Throughout my entire lifetime (enduring a multitude of illnesses, disappointments, hardships, and tragedies while nonetheless bearing witness to the sufferings and setbacks encountered by all those around me), I still believed fervently that all of our dualistic encumbrances could be dissolved, even before each of us eventually ventures off through the portal of death into that ethereal unknown.

For decades, I always have assumed I could overcome poor health by maintaining systematic routines consisting of meditation, prayer, and affirmations—along with rigorous physical exercise, a balanced diet, removing sources of toxins from both my indoor and outdoor environments, and employing self-administered methods of alternative healing including acupressure, visualization, various breathing techniques, and massage.

Although the abovementioned practices definitely increased certain aspects of my health considerably, I still couldn't seem to realize a long-lasting remedy for the waves of anxiety and depression that also came upon me in somewhat of a cyclical pattern. Nevertheless, those several beneficial routines did make significant and more lasting improvements to my physical health and to various other important aspects of my life, albeit very gradually most of the time.

[37] *Non-dichotomous oneness* might best be described as the actual state of divine oneness that can never be a part of any dualistic pair of opposing forces, conditions, or states of being. Examples of these types of divisive duos can include when oneness struggles with either separateness, nothingness, incompleteness, or diffusiveness.

Yet, there were also those seemingly auspicious moments when they appeared to manifest almost instantly—*in the twinkling of an eye*.

Up until just a few years ago, none of those three routines of meditation, prayer, and the reciting of affirmations (which I have regularly practiced for decades) were ever combined to form a single regimen. Instead, I always engaged with each of them separately. After all, this is how they have been most frequently employed by the majority of spiritual practitioners throughout the ages—at least, by those with whom I was familiar. But once deciding to join all of them together as a single routine, it instantly became apparent to me to envision them as part of yet another garden metaphor (comparing their own mutually symbiotic relationship with one another to a specific trio of farm crops known as the *Three Sisters*).

That highly effective *garden trinity* has been developed and employed throughout North America for millennia and now continues to thrive worldwide, though not usually in industrial farming. Here is part of an article on the subject found in *Wikipedia*:

> The Three Sisters are the three main agricultural crops of various Indigenous peoples of North America: squash, maize ("corn"), and climbing beans (typically tepary beans[38] or common beans). In a technique known as companion planting, the maize and beans are often planted together in mounds formed by hilling soil around the base of the plants each year; squash is typically planted between the mounds. The cornstalk serves as a trellis for climbing beans, the beans fix nitrogen in their root nodules and stabilize the maize in high winds, and the wide leaves of the squash plant shade the ground, keeping the soil moist and helping prevent the establishment of weeds.
>
> Indigenous peoples throughout North America cultivated different varieties of the Three Sisters, adapted to varying local environments. The individual crops and their use in polyculture[39] originated in Mesoamerica; where squash was domesticated first, followed by maize and then beans, over a period of 5,000–6,500 years. European records from the sixteenth century describe highly productive Indigenous agriculture based on cultivation of the Three Sisters throughout what are now the Eastern United States and Canada, where the crops were used for both food and trade. Geographer Carl O. Sauer described

[38] An annual twining bean native to Mexico and the southwestern United States.

[39] According to *Microsoft Bing's Online Dictionary*, polyculture is "the simultaneous cultivation or exploitation of several crops or kinds of animals…"

the Three Sisters as "a symbiotic plant complex of North and Central America without an equal elsewhere".

As my own, emblematic version of the Three Sisters was evolving into an effective method for *mind-gardening*, I soon discovered that by fashioning this single routine out of the three separate practices—which, having been said before, I have always employed independently for decades—my body and mind rapidly began to experience substantially more consistent and effective outcomes of peace, improved health, and increased happiness than at any time previously. It was a truly significant, transformational shift unlike anything else I have ever experienced.

As in the beginning of this section of the book (indicated by its title, *A simple method for transmuting weeds into wonders*), this personally fashioned Three-Sisters blending of meditations, prayers, and affirmations has indeed proven itself to be a clear, uncomplicated solution for transmuting my own individual weeds of those dualistic struggles between anguish-producing afflictions and temporary hiatuses of fleeting good health and happiness into blossoms of ongoing, cathartic wonders.

XVII.

Consciously seeding the soil...

Instead of diving directly into the specifics on how to establish and utilize this *three-sisters contemplative approach to mind gardening*[40] and how it can be a vital tool for expanding

[40] It became the most beneficial means (even so far as evolving into a veritable devotion on its own) for integrating affirmations and prayers with a meditational practice. And after adopting the Three Sisters companion planting method as its namesake, I discovered that this image of a longstanding agricultural method together with my three daily spiritual practices conjured up a singularly clear and memorable metaphor. United together, they helped in reminding me how best to utilize my spiritual practices as both a trio of vital tools for the conscious gardener and three necessary components of a *well-tended* , bountiful, and well-balanced garden of the mind.

awareness and resolving a myriad of day-to-day challenges, it first seems appropriate to provide a brief bit of backstory.

As I have mentioned earlier, meditating and the recitation of both prayers and affirmations have always been essential tools for improving my physical and emotional health in addition to benefiting many other aspects of life. That being said, there were still many times when I faced extended stretches of considerable anxiety and despair despite all of the ongoing improvements.

Such tenuous interludes tended to be triggered by flare-ups from the ongoing infections I have had since childhood or as a result of traumatic and destabilizing situations that also seemed to emerge episodically. On these occasions, any sense of balance and peace instilled by practicing my three *gardening disciplines* was often reduced dramatically; and I would fall back predictably into a state of depression yet again—although, almost never as extreme as what I experienced when my younger self was less practiced in using the restorative tools of meditation, prayer, and affirmations.

Regardless, these burdens persisted in manifesting as part of a seemingly inevitable succession of recurring obstacles hindering my overall wellbeing for decades. But it wasn't until more recent years when a series of insights revealed a process for substantially reducing these unending problems in a way that was far more effective than anything I had attempted earlier; and in some situations, my problems were eliminated altogether. This is how a notion of my own version of *Three Sisters* began to evolve into a viable practice for mind gardening.

But the first thing I needed in order to accomplish this was to discover and implement a powerful **affirmation** that could quickly release me from all current surges of disappointment, frustration, anxiety, and depression whenever any of those habitual illnesses or disruptive circumstances showed up yet again. Consequently, it would then evolve quickly into the initial component for what I eventually referred to as the *Three Sisters* meditation.

It finally occurred to me what intentions that my new affirmation should convey. Instead of utilizing some mystical mantra, the words I decided to employ had their potency hidden behind an outwardly commonplace meaning. Moreover, I came to realize that it not only could be sown and re-sown as a daily affirmation (and the first of the *Three Sisters*) but also could subsequently be cultivated equally as one of the second sisters containing the **prayer** element in addition to this affirmation *sister*. Yet, in more commonplace contexts, a statement like this might be considered to be nothing more than an excessively simplistic cliché:

Everything is as it should be…

At first glance, this rather well-used expression might appear too prosaic and conceivably trite to comprise a real potential for lifting me (or anyone else) out of depression while immediately alleviating or removing any physical, mental, or emotional pain as well. However, when I considered the phrase more closely, it actually had a precise, underlying significance necessary for stopping the spread of these afflictions and other types of dualistic weeds straight away.

After all, if we reconsider Krista Tippett's aforementioned remark indicating that our *words make worlds* while also bearing in mind that a countless supply of words and phrases have an infinite number of alternate meanings locked up inside each of them, then this signifies that words have the potential for making an infinite variety of worlds. Consequently, the only factor determining what characteristics eventually arise above all others—giving words the potency to specifically shape any subsequent *worlds*—is our underlying, well-practiced intentions infused within each of those words. That can happen regardless of whether those intentions have been conceived, actuated, and repeatedly employed consciously or unconsciously and filled with (or devoid of) divine love.

Therefore, whenever we say or think that *everything is as it should be*, this curious little expression can obviously indicate a glib acknowledgment about how things in life are solely what they appear to be at face value—nothing more or nothing less. However, anointing this phrase with such a fatalistic connotation can simply provide power to an affirmation of acquiescence. That is to say, whatever our supposed lot in life is, we would do well to accept its dualistic bad with the good, to *grin and bear it*, to *go with the flow*, and even to acknowledge the possible validity in the following age-old platitude—while uttering it with residual traces of hope and humor intertwined with whatever dichotomous feelings of resignation also might be present:

Che sarà, sarà.[41]

Or, as the English version indicates…

[41] This Italian saying became well-known internationally after a tune with the same name was written by the songwriting team of Jay Livingston and Ray Evans, published in 1955. The following year, it appeared in the Alfred Hitchcock's 1956 movie *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. During the course of the film, the song was performed by American actress and singer Doris Day.

Whatever will be will be.

We also could accept (with a dismayed sigh and a shake of our heads) an even darker interpretation of this saying without so much of a hint of levity accompanying it. In fact, the following translation of a Russian rendering suggests that life itself inevitably can be perceived as something synonymous to eventually resigning into every dualistic struggle, suffering, and defeat put upon us by expressing them by fatalistically declaring that:

...life is life.[42]

Yet, when (consciously or unconsciously) choosing to employ an alternative meaning as the basis for our intentions, then they might possibly maintain that when *everything is as it should be*—whether the situation has taken a turn for better or worse—they are insisting that whatever occurs (no matter how wondrous or devastating their circumstances may appear at the moment, and with whatever purpose or lack thereof fuels such results to materialize), there nonetheless can be an ultimately justifiable and blessed reason for it all. But it's one that nobody can simply comprehend at this stage of human existence. So (vernacularly speaking), they are willing to:

Count their blessings, even while accepting life's punches as they come.

They also might acknowledge ardently that everything will eventually work itself out for the best by saying:

All is right with the world.

Or, as was stated earlier:

...as it should be.

Nevertheless, we instead could foster a more refined, non-dualistic meaning for our intentions whenever implementing that phrase:

---

[42] Similar adages are also widely embraced such as:

C'est la vie [That's life]

and:

So ist das Leben [Such is life].

Everything is as it should be.

Regardless of whether we employ it while reciting a solely personal affirmation or prayer, or—contrastingly—as a totally universal alternative aimed to include everyone and everything, our focus should be acknowledging not only that *all is right with the world* (meaning that everything is already in a never-ending state of being perfect and sanctified), but that the more our intentions are aligned with this particular understanding of these words, the more our circumstances will appear to be immediately and miraculously transformed or *fall away* from incessant, dualistic shifting between disruption and peace, hardship and ease, and the turbulence of all other dualities into everything already being a part of the continuous stream of divine occurrences and resolutions. In other words:

Everything is [perfect] as it should be…

This can intend that rather than merely being an affirmation expressing our hopes and desires shifting from bad into good, wrong into right, sorrow into joy, disease into health, and scourges into sanctities, it is a mindful intention assisting everyone and everything into realizing the veritable and eternal nature of everything. It reveals how we are forever pregnant with luminous potential, poised to give both emblematic and literal births to an ultimate blessedness upon our world, and have already manifested them fully as the most perfectly balanced outcomes beyond all other possible, impossible, probable, or improbable outcomes.

Furthermore, by repeatedly reciting with consistency and certainty how *everything is as it should be*, we will soon accept that all blossoms of compassion have always been flourishing everywhere around us. This was true as we were being deceived by the weeds of duality, even before gaining this heightened awareness, and even while we still thought that no fragrant blossoms of our garden were anywhere to be found.

Regardless, a mantric phrase such as this one has the intrinsic capacity of creating new domains out of its misleadingly unsophisticated words and can forever reveal to us how our words are forever making new worlds.

However, our words don't only contain the capacity to make worlds out of the often mindless, dichotomous thoughts and beliefs underlying those words, but they can likewise fashion (from the unspoken thoughts, words, and quiet whisperings of love's pure intentions within our hearts), the perfect shapes and forms of an ever-present domain materialized out of divine love

itself.

That being said, it would also be prudent to recollect that most of the current conditions of the world that we always accepted previously as being the sole sum of *normal* existence are instead merely weed-ridden contrivances of duality. And although we may have acknowledged and identified them exclusively as endless struggle, strife, hunger, disease, despair, and death brought about by humanity's ongoing affirmations and implementations of every conceivable permutation of greed, prejudice, exploitation, and an infinite number of other hopelessly dark and desperate conditions seeming to exist without end. There nonetheless hides within those dense weeds of illusion and artifice a paradoxically genuine reality—which veritably embraces and fills everything (in every place and every time) with its never-ending, all-encompassing love.

So for that reason, it is essential to recondition the inner soil of our garden by consistently utilizing the routines and philosophies of the mind gardener and employ this common phrase stated above as our constant affirmation, prayer, and meditational mantra. Yet, we should use its words exclusively for the purpose of acknowledging the existence of ever-present compassion in our world—potent enough to weed out and nullify *in the twinkling of an eye* all other potential meanings and purposes with any dichotomous intentions whatsoever.

We will then be able to perceive (while insisting upon our mantric notion of *everything is as it should be*) that the world is always surrounding us in perfected divine love, existing everywhere—even in every time, every place, within us now. And as we persist in using this affirmation with the sole intention of practicing love, we will see with new eyes refocusing our awareness from weedy landscapes of dualistic illusion back towards the never-ending reality of our genuine existence, one which has always been thriving within love's boundless perfection (regardless of what we thought or believed beforehand).

Indeed, this seemingly idyllic *place* has heretofore been identified as being completely unattainable, indisputably imaginary, non-existent, or solely prevailing in our fantasies, dreams, and myths. This may appear to be true; yet it has remained apart from us only because of our unconscious, persistent choices to practice seeding dualistic thoughts upon the world.

Regardless, as has been mentioned earlier, once we have come to realize the subsequent dilemma that our shifting, unconscious, unloving, fear-ridden, self-absorbed choices have created for us all, it is essential to appreciate that such practices have been nothing other than the source of establishing and maintaining an individual and collective reality dominated by

weeds. Moreover, those weeds have continued to appear as the deceptive, spurious, and dualistic flowerings of illusion that the vast majority of us consider to be the totality of our life on earth.

Yet, for us to ultimately dissolve these tainted perceptions of reality, we must commence sowing consistent and persistent thoughts of divine love. With the assistance of that single and singular affirmation discussed above, this simple and supple statement could become the first of the metaphoric *Three Sisters* to be sown within our *mind garden* as a surprisingly potent seed and equally effective nutrient that can also aid any subsequent seeds to sprout and develop fully.

Indeed, stating this simple apothegm over and over again, *everything is as it should be*, has the unforeseen potential to direct us in transforming our perceptions, beliefs, and so-called *realities* from weed-ridden delusions (seemingly shifting unendingly from negative to positive and back again) into actual miraculous materializations of true compassion—which is instead the veritable aggregate of genuine reality—where no illusions can ever exist.

When I first started employing this phrase as my mantric affirmation (acknowledging that eternal healing, reconciliation, and balance with all things were always at work within each of us now, as well as being forever within every aspect of our lives), this potent assertion soon transformed into an utterance of utmost inspiration, hope, and joy for me. Moreover, it also became a steadfast symbol that we have always been in a state of veritable perfection and grace since birth.

Throughout most of my earlier life, I was inclined to focus unwittingly upon the untended weeds spreading uncontrollably around me while they perpetually prevented me from seeing much of the amazing perfection and grace essentially filling all of life. Consequently, as a majority of us do, I found myself viewing our world as a hopeless, futile, and chaotic state of affairs—not unlike how Hamlet bemoaned our worldly existence in his bleak monologue cited earlier.[43]

However, once I began to employ the saying mentioned above—as a prayer, affirmation,

[43] For quick reference, I have once again included his soliloquy here:

> How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
> Seem to me all the uses of this world!
> Fie on't! ah fie! Tis an unweeded garden,
> That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
> Possess it merely. That it should come to this!

and meditation—I soon realized that those words employed collectively were an essential seed of thought that all of us could practice sowing indefinitely, in order to reveal to ourselves how divine love's presence is always within and around everyone and everything. It exists in all situations and in all times and places.

Regardless of how discouraging and terrible things might have appeared to me previously at any given moment, remarkable changes suddenly began transpiring as endless arrays of fully cathartic shifts. I could almost automatically perceive them clearly while they altered every imbalanced condition that manifested throughout my life. Surprisingly, these liberating, newfound transformations also kept revealing themselves to me *in the twinkling of an eye*.

Likewise, in more recent years, when interacting with those who had sudden, dark mood swings, unprovoked outbursts of antagonism or rage, or irrational verbal attacks that were hurtful, rude, and occasionally threatening, I regularly urged them to communicate to me about what was actually going on with them in order to understand their extreme mood swings. Eventually, I realized that many of my verbal attempts to reason with them often yielded little or no rectifying results. So, rather than endeavoring to assuage such outbursts by hopefully responding with both logical and rectifying suggestions (which nonetheless sometimes caused the then-existing rants only to accelerate into even more serious tirades), I decided to change my tack by doing and saying absolutely nothing in reply.

Instead, I would simply think to myself assuredly yet gently:

> Everything is as it should be.

Then I would often qualify and extend this silent *mantra* by adding a few additional phrases—roughly along these lines:

> All that manifests between *us*[44] is completely blessed and filled with divine love. All past, present, and future transgressions either of us has inflicted upon the other have been forgiven and dissolved. Moreover, to the other person(s) we forever extend only kindness, joy, comfort, and peace.

After practicing this modest and simple ritual just a few times, I was frequently dumbfounded to find that it took only brief moments for the other individual (or individuals) to

[44] This particular "us" obviously included me along with whomever I was interacting at the time.

become completely calm after I recited these words; and the people in question showed no further indications of remaining hostility or annoyance. Amazingly, it seemed as though whatever ultimately sparked and sustained their emotional flare-up was suddenly removed, even as if it had never existed at all. In addition, such transformational shifts began happening consistently again and again—as long as I continued to utilize this response nonverbally, in total silence.

During one such cathartic instance, my mind unexpectedly drifted back to decades ago, when I was conveying silent prayers and blessings to that tall African stranger on a New York City subway car. As we all might now recall this story together, the man approached me suddenly and expressed his gratitude through kind words and an unfathomably tender gaze. And apparently, he did all of this after having either intuited, felt, or actually *heard* my mute whisperings offered up on his behalf. Aside from that, he also seemed to know what my name was and uttered it while facing me.

Decades later, revisiting how my own thoughts apparently had a quantifiable effect on at least a part of the tangible world around me at the time, I eventually realized that there indeed was a semblance of divine love instantaneously rising between the black stranger and myself. Moreover, this occurred despite our both being confined within an extremely rank, rumbling, claustrophobic, and inescapable netherworld environment; and it must have become apparent to each of us while I simply cast a few compassionate musings towards that austere giant of a fellow.

So even in that seemingly unconducive subway setting, our auspicious encounter could have only manifested after the rooting out of my own personal *weeds* while we both acknowledged that *everything is as it should be*. And this apparently manifested in either some conscious or otherwise unconscious form of divine love resounding within and around us.

That being said, it still could be considered being no more or less potent than when I deliberately and methodically used the above *mantric statement* in more recent times to transmute unexpected conflicts and confrontations with others into insubstantial (though, definitely not unsubstantial) resolutions predicated by divine love.

This is similarly true for all of us as soon as we acknowledge that—indeed—everything is truly as it should be! In fact, once we completely accept that nothing but divine love exists in the world, in our lives, in the totality of our seeming weaknesses, tribulations, and shortcomings, Maya's veil of illusion is obligated to evaporate *in the twinkling of an ey*e as we

then can perceive fully our own perfect and balanced good and the perfect and balanced good in all others.

XVIII.

Effecting "three sisters"...

As I have already given a somewhat generalized description of how I began to incorporate the Three Sisters into my customary practice every day, it might be even more clarifying to now spell (step-by-step) the entire process while considering it as yet another metaphor to guide us toward conscious gardening.

If we return to the first section within Chapter 5 (entitled *an anatomical portrait of gardens and gardening*), we will soon come across a list of routines that are essential in order to create and care for a productive garden. Here is the list cited one more time:

1. *Clearing*
2. *Planting*
3. *Fertilizing (and nourishing)*
4. *Weeding*
5. *Fencing (and protecting)*
6. *Pruning*

I again refer to it at this juncture because whenever proceeding with my daily *mind gardening routine*, these itemized tasks map out the procedure I found to be most beneficial whenever uniting my meditation, affirmations, and prayers into the aforementioned harmonious and symbiotic trio:

...my own personal version of the Three Sisters.

However, it is important to keep these processes as straightforward as possible to prevent them from becoming convoluted. Therefore, I have reduced the list of garden chores to only three condensed steps instead:

1. *Clearing and weeding (that which we remove from the soil)*
2. *Planting and nourishing (that which we enter into the soil)*
3. *Fencing and pruning (that which we implement to protect and maintain everything within the garden)*

I would begin each session with a conventional breathing exercise—inhaling slowly and deeply through my nose and then exhaling in the same manner, but from my mouth. Intermittently, I also would visualize each set of those breaths (traveling inward and then outward) as penetrating into the depths of the soil and then blowing out—or *extracting*—all extraneous weeds and other debris (namely our dualistic thoughts and emotions).[45]

After continuing this clearing process for several seconds or multiple minutes (whichever seemed to be the most appropriate for that particular instance), I then reimagined those inhalations as a means for also drawing inwardly both an energy of fertilization while planting consciously selected seeds simultaneously; and rather than immediately exhaling as before, I instead held my breath completely. This allowed me to remain deep within the garden soil so as to feed it with feelings of untainted love. At this point, I always envisioned my mantric phrase as the initial seed being impregnated with love's fertilizing energy within those garden depths while voicelessly *thinking* its presence into the soil:

Everything is as it should be…

After a few seconds (continuing **not** to exhale), I would begin to respire once again. As the exhalation continued, I then repeated one more time my vital little phrase; but in this final instance, I said the words quietly aloud—so as if the idea of those words were actually materializing outwardly into corporeal existence—as the blessed flowerings of manifestation began to take form.

I often practiced successively this entire routine numerous times in a row. But between

[45] I always allowed this process to continue for a brief or extended period—whatever amount of time seemed appropriate for me to feel more relaxed and at peace. It was equally important not to allow my practice to become either fatiguing, boring, or even forced. However, if it did accidentally cross the line into those domains, I found it is best to immediately proceed to the next step.

each occasion when I went through the entire process once, l would pause for as long as was needed to quietly add an appropriate prayer or affirmation before starting over again, so as to realize the full potency of joining the Three Sisters together (all of my affirmations and prayers) into a single, symbiotic, and unifying meditation.

However, this is not to deny the fact that similar techniques have certainly been employed by others throughout the ages. But for me, the discovery of joining all three practices harmoniously into one was truly a radical change, because it especially reinforced and made memorable my use of garden metaphors unlike anything else did—persistently improving everything that transpired in my life. And even when crises still cropped up, their effect upon me tended to be less severe while they also dissipated more quickly and completely whenever they happened.

There is yet another essential point to be aware of here. During the slow inhalations while commencing to breathe deeply, I began consciously practicing a slight smile on my face as to indicate that there were only elements of inspiration, joy, beauty, and overall balance being drawn into my being. Furthermore, once I held my breath and formed the thought of how *everything is as it should be*, that insignificant smile nevertheless tended to manifest in me the chills and goosebumps that generated sensations of intensely electrifying, mesmeric, and occasionally paradoxical stillness and peace. Moreover, each subsequent occasion when I went through that routine, the feelings of electricity frequently increased and oftentimes lasted much longer, sometimes being greatly extended into hours or even days at a time.

Once I went through this entire clearing/fertilizing/planting process multiple times, I then would refrain from all of its activity by meditating exclusively—silently letting go of every preconceived notion, objective, worry, fear, judgment, and all other probable or potential weeds of duality. Instead, this was the moment for me either to allow gestation to begin beneath the more palpable surface of our mental soil or simply to permit the winter season of our thoughts to unfold into that fallow resting place where the heart of divine love resides. This is vital to assist the blossoming and eventual harvesting of any full-fledged divine attributes to manifest.

XIX.

Where inspiration and aspiration may lead...

Recently, I have often thought back to all of those countless, unique experiences that have visited me throughout the decades and how each of them—today—brings to the forefront of my mind one single question above all others:

Why?

I am reminded of my ongoing, lifelong struggles with chronic physical pain, with all the restrictions and limitations accompanying that pain, and *why* my perseverance through all the ensuing difficulties was critical for my surviving the decades by discovering our innately human ability to transform ourselves with divine grace. Consequently, I am also reminded of *why* my passionate hopes and dreams always seemed to propel me eventually past those seemingly dark vicissitudes into increasingly hope-filled circumstances of catharsis and grace.

Although desperate and even tragic events continued to march across my personal landscape, I still persisted in asking myself *why* did there always appear to be an equal or greater amassment of blessings to counter or even vanquish those ongoing hardships and challenges? Equally, I have contemplated endlessly *why* visions and other wondrous phenomena seemed to transform countless aspects of my dualistically experiential existence into nothing less than the miraculous outcomes that ultimately bequeathed unto me an ultimate sense of unity with everything—encompassing all of us within divine love itself.

Once again, I was reminded of my brief encounter with the stranger on the Manhattan subway. It occurred (of course) with that tall African man who approached me just before exiting our train and thanked me by name for the silent prayers I happened to be sending his way.

There was that rare red wolf who escorted me out of the woods numerous times over the course of a couple of weeks or so. He ended each occasion by bestowing upon me a single, wolfish wail possibly proclaiming to me as being the unique herald, announcing a sudden and significant shift in my entire life about to transpire.

There were also the multiple happenings over the years that tended to manifest before

me in the dead of night. These included many of those countless situations where seemingly invisible, magnetized hands led me to unexpected moments of great significance—changing my life for the better, and even saving it. Moreover (aside from those recounted in this book), there assuredly were hundreds of other episodes that graced my being throughout the decades as well. Whenever I pondered over this endless succession of transformative events, I eventually came to the conclusion that they all had one critical characteristic in common:

They each directed me into a true sense of enduring awe, insight, and grace.

As I have revisited each section of this book multiple times, it has become widely apparent that as my perceptions and awareness have continued to expand and evolve for decades—past our five *everyday* senses—there was only one genuinely non-dualistic and veritable purpose for doing so. And up to the current day, things looked as though every heightened discernment revealed to me was opening up a new pathway with a single destination in mind.

One of my most recent transformational shifts toward this perceptual end certainly began when I became inspired to employ my own version of the *Three Sisters* companion planting, which in turn has definitely brought about a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of how to proceed on this metaphoric journey into divine love. And in turn, it has persisted in amplifying my awarenesses so I can consciously continue to embrace and care for that unifying entirety of the Mind Garden beckoning to us all.

- Chapter 8 -

Flowers of Love

I.

An ultimate yearning...

Our perceptions of love are often seen as a highly personalized understanding, one which must be experienced and expressed in a completely unique and individualized fashion; but we can also insist that it is paradoxically the solitary (yet amalgamating) totality of everything. Simultaneously, it can be seen as the sole seed of an entire cosmos and the uniting essence of the divine.

Accordingly, if we could will our physical selves back among the earliest moments retained within human remembrance, there would always be found a single desire imprinted upon every member of our species. More and more, we are realizing that this longing for love has continually manifested within other creatures as well, in either a conscious and humanly comprehensible manner or in ways that are equally unconscious and unfathomable—at least, through our finite, human grasp of the matter.

From my own personal experiences, including the perspectives constantly being formulated and evolving from said experiences (as well as those underwent by other individuals who have also practiced being particularly receptive to the more intangible aspects of reality), it can readily become apparent that the urge to bond and ultimately to love has most likely been ever-present amid even the devastating scourges of all natural and man-made disasters—including the ravages and hateful insanities of war and all other dualistic struggles. But, aside from realizing our longings to embrace and to be embraced eternally by divine compassion, we must also consider all of the other multi-faceted ways in which the idea of love can be interpreted and experienced.

Seen from within the separating veils of duality's illusory nature, love often seems to reflect various, oftentimes-conflicting ideas. In ancient Greek society love regularly was perceived as three distinct, dualistically separating concepts: *eros* (romantic, erotic, or

passionate love), *filia* (platonic, *brotherly* and *sisterly* love, or love in friendship), and *agape* (eternal, spiritual, compassionate, selfless love). Agape often was perceived as at least some semblance of the actual occurrence of divine love itself.

When we think of these various definitions of love, it is important to remember that countless other usages of the word (at least, when employing such concepts in English and in many other languages as well) normally have nothing to do with any of these more traditional and universally accepted definitions at all. This ongoing conundrum simply becomes another semantical issue where certain applications of the word deviate drastically from the ultimate, non-dualistic meaning—the one which I have continually referred to as being *divine love*.

For example, we can love pizza, a certain pair of shoes, or a memorable passage in a book. Equally, we can love going to the beach, sitting at the summit of any chosen mountain peak, ascending the express elevator to a downtown skyscraper observatory, or simply watching our favorite, weekly television show. But what do these things have to do with the love that pervades all aspects of our eternal garden of mind?

Dualistically speaking, they have nothing to do with this at all; and yet, they ironically have everything to do with it as well. Whenever we separate divine love from anything and everything else, we merely are planting another weed of duality into soil of the mind and distort divine love into something disconnected from all of us—making it distant and unattainable in one moment, yet hopefully accessible perhaps in the next. Thus, it always remains as a part of our countless daily dichotomous struggles.

However, when we truly practice love effectively, then we realize that divine love forever exists in each of our favorite Continental, American, Asian, African, or any traditional indigenous foods on which we are about to dine. It actually emanates from out of our favorite footwear, is imbedded within the inspiring words found in our most beloved stories, will forever be felt in our hearts when we hear our children laugh or cry, and can be profoundly experienced as a timeless embrace with the long-lost friend who has been absent from our lives for decades. Not only should it be the entirety of every ecstatic encounter we share with our significant other but in everything else that we think, say, and do on a moment-to-moment basis. In fact, we are each capable of discovering divine love existing in all things, in all places, and at all times.

But recognizing this truth is only the beginning of our journey to appreciating our oneness with all of these. The way to actually become a conscious part of this love is by constantly practicing the blessed act of expressing our appreciation and gratitude for all of those who have

been an integral part of providing such joys and pleasures to us.

There are the farm hands in the wheat fields of Sicily who toil amid dust and extreme heat. Without them, the endless assortments of imported pastas never would have found their way to our dinner plates. We must remember the truckers who perish in road accidents—after falling asleep at the wheel—while rushing to deliver our beloved stories to the book stores where we are able to purchase them.

Shouldn't we be remembering the destitute sweatshop workers in Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, among many other places? How can we fail to appreciate, acknowledge, and be eternally thankful for all of their endless sufferings—especially, since they receive only meager pennies per day for their pain-ridden and universally unappreciated efforts on our behalf. Most importantly, these neglected souls indeed are our providers. They faithfully produce the beautiful clothing and footwear we take for granted.

Most of us perceive all of our material luxuries as being nothing more than additional things that we choose to possess temporarily. How many times do we then mindlessly cast them into the ever-increasing, real-estate-consuming, disease-spreading, and resource-depleting garbage dumps and vast landfills spreading worldwide—even to the remotest human settlements found anywhere where urban sprawl doesn't already exist? Some of these *scrapheaps* are so massive that they now can be seen from outer space.

There are those who labor tirelessly and unappreciated among the rice paddies in Vietnam and Cambodia. Migrant workers and dirt farmers in Mexico, Appalachian America, Brazil, South Africa, and China toil with little or no reward to produce a variety of crops that keep our grocery shelves well-stocked. So many of those laboring can barely bring home enough money to feed their own families from day to day.

Shouldn't we also remember the countless factory and dock workers, construction teams, store clerks, cashiers, gas station attendants, crews on cargo and container ships (which are still not yet fully automated), and the staff members on trains and planes who tirelessly provide us with every type of good and service imaginable? How many billions of these people are bound to us through their desperation, demanded dedication, ongoing hardship, untold miseries and tears, and even loss of life so that we may unthinkingly relish the single pickle, peanut, or potato chip placed between our lips while gazing out of any window in high-rise apartment buildings existing everywhere across the globe?

After all, how would we feel if our life situations were reversed and we were the ones

being exploited by billions of other people worldwide without even the slightest recognition for not even a fraction of our service and sufferings? Without at least expressing a silent moment of recognition regularly in our lives, we then are rejecting that there are no expressions of gratitude (being either significant or slight) that could possibly have an effect on anything else that exists—in one way or another.

When we are not in the position to express our appreciation face-to-face with those who deserve being thanked, then it is still essential to bring our love and appreciation to them through our thoughts. Whether we currently believe it or not, even our most silent and private introspections can be felt by others. Remember (from an earlier part of this book) how that mysterious African man came up to my younger self on the subway, called me by name, and thanked me for the invisible intercessions of the heart that I uttered silently on his behalf.

When we are not inclined to demonstrate unconditional and unending kindness and appreciation towards all others, we cannot consider ourselves to be conscious gardeners—nor can any of the religious-minded among us call themselves true Christians, Jews, Moslems, Baha'is, Hindus, Buddhists, Sufis, Jains, or anyone else among us who professes to be loving and merciful. For without the will to express gratitude, compassion, and all other attributes of divine love actively, we forever remain a dualistic weed among an infinite host of other weeds.

The only avenue for finding our way out of this quagmire of needless dualistic struggle and strife is by applying the first tool of conscious gardening:

Continually practice and perfect empathy towards all others and towards ourselves as well.

Perhaps the most simple way to begin doing this is by following that ancient teaching found in most religious and ethical philosophies worldwide. Essentially, it is known as the Golden Rule:

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Moreover, there is also a negative (or reversed) variant of this adage—which is often used instead—and is sometimes referred to as the Silver Rule: *doing **not** unto others* what we don't want for ourselves rather than simply *doing unto others* that which we do desire in our lives.

Here are just a few variations of these two ageless maxims as they have been conveyed through various spiritual and religious writings worldwide: [1]

[1] The following variants on the Golden (and Silver) Rule are quoted from: *World Scripture, A Comparative Anthology Of Sacred Texts*, edited by Andrew Wilson.

Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you.[2]

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.[3]

Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them.[4]

Not one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.[5]

A man should wander about treating all creatures as he himself would be treated.[6]

Try your best to treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself, and you will find that this is the shortest way to benevolence.[7]

One should not behave towards others in a way which is disagreeable to oneself.[8]

One going to take a pointed stick to pinch a baby bird should first try it on himself to feel how it hurts.[9]

What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor.[10]

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.[11]

An important way to increase our ability to care for others as much as we care for ourselves is to reflect on how we would feel if someone treated us as unkindly and thoughtlessly as we have treated various other individuals in the past. We then should also reflect on how we might be treating those around us currently in an unloving manner even while we already are denying to ourselves beforehand how hurtful, rude, and selfish our actions truly are.

Aside from the obviously blatant affronts we can commit such as lying to, stealing from,

---

[2] From the Confucian text: Analects 15.23.

[3] From the Old Testament of the Christian Bible (Jewish Torah), Leviticus 19:18.

[4] From the New Testament, Matthew 7:12.

[5] From the Islamic text: Forty Hadith of an-Nawawi 13.

[6] From the Jain scripture: Sutrakritanga 1.11.33.

[7] From Confucian writings: Mencius VII.A.4.

[8] From the Hindu scripture: Mahabharata, Anusasana Parva 113.8.

[9] From a proverb found in the traditional Yaruba religion of Nigeria.

[10] From the Jewish Talmud, Shabbat 31a.

[11] From the New Testament, Matthew 22:37.

or seriously injuring anybody else, we must also question ourselves thoroughly about all of the more subtle and even undetectable hurts that we might regularly inflict without actually being aware of it:

Do we think, feel, say, and do even the slightest uncaring or spiteful things towards anyone else?

Do we systematically tell others what to do?

Do we feel compelled to give unwarranted advice?

Do we chronically criticize, boss, bully, or put down anyone?

Do we expect people to call, write, provide favors ,or visit us without ever having to return the kindness?

Do we maintain the habit of always making others wait for us?

Are we always late for our appointments?

Do we customarily accept the gifts and services of somebody else without expressing our thanks or responding in kind?

Do we constantly fabricate excuses so we don't have to admit to particular actions of which we are not proud and for which we don't want to take responsibility?

When those around us are happy and excited about something they hope to accomplish, is our reaction one that inevitably expresses doubt about their prospects?

Do we feel and act jealously or resentfully whenever we are faced with the good fortune of others?

Do we find it difficult to praise and encourage anyone else?

Do we constantly find fault with the hopes and dreams of those who we profess to love?

When anyone speaks to us of their accomplishments, do we feel compelled to devalue their talents by casting their abilities in a negative light while comparing them with our own?

Do we always insist that our achievements are so much better than those attained by others?

Do we react to other individuals' successes with overt or underlying envy, contempt, or hostility?
Do we always need to have the last say in any discussion?
Are we careless about keeping our promises?
Do we betray the trust of others?
When groups or individuals wrong us, do we feel the need to retaliate?
Do we gossip or say hurtful things about people behind their backs?
Do we project an attitude of being better than everyone else?
Do we hold grudges?
Are we incapable of feeling and expressing forgiveness, affection, reassurance, or gratitude?

The list of such attitudes and actions can go on forever. Yet, if we can say *yes* to even one of these instances, then we should readily ask ourselves:

How hurtful and destructive would it be for me to be a constant target and to feel the brunt of such imbalanced, unloving, duality-inducing attitudes and behaviors?

Once we are able to admit to ourselves that they certainly wouldn't be pleasing to us at all, then the next step is to identify every time we are about to implement those same undesirables towards others and compel ourselves to stop instantly. It is just that we have a bad habit that needs correcting and must also be replaced with a more compassionate one. This is a simple way to commence with our weeding of the mind garden.

However, if we ignore or refuse to change even the subtlest of these destructive patterns, then any perception that we have about ourselves as being spiritual, kind, or divinely good in the slightest respect is a weedy illusion only capable of spawning further dualities. Instead, we are allowing these hurtful behaviors merely to grow unchecked.

They can be seen as weeds forming into potent pods of further dualistic seeds—ripening and awaiting the moment to spread across every aspect of our material reality. They do indeed have the potential of further contaminating the entirety of our world. In fact, they already have been in the process of doing so insistently throughout the ages and continue to do it even now.

If this isn't what we truly want for ourselves, then we must get out the tools of the

conscious gardener and begin compassionately to tend our garden without delay! Not only do these sorts of *weediness* occur within the day-to-day activities and the secular lives of most people overall, but many excessively zealous or fanatical individuals do incredibly hateful and destructive things to those they profess to love as they judge, condemn, and punish them constantly in the name of their philosophical ideals or religious faith.

For now, let us focus our attention on the following story of how Saint Mother Teresa[12] actually saw *the face of God* within every scoundrel, thief, rapist, or murderer who ever came face-to-face with her. It is only the influence of dualistic weeds that have coaxed any number of the rest of us into judging ourselves as being better, more righteous, more intelligent, more beautiful, more worthy, or more anything else than all those around us. Clearly, if the dualistic conditions containing either judgment or superiority were something that ever challenged Mother Teresa earlier in life, she clearly overcame such illusory weeds by perfecting her lifelong practice of seeing, serving, and loving God within everyone.

In Krista Tippett's book *Becoming Wise: An Inquiry into the Mystery and the Art of Living*, the author recounts one of her conversations with physicist Arthur Zajonc.[13] In the following passage, she quotes him speaking about his trip to San Quentin Penitentiary with Mother Teresa. He recalls how this remarkably selfless and humble woman lovingly addressed some of the high security inmates on death row and how she also observed our own universal oneness with the divine:

> She tells them in that little tiny voice that if you want to see the face of God, look at the prisoner standing next to you. This man who has murdered and raped: that's the face of God…
>
> …I'd been looking at the holy picture all this time when I should look more closely at the face of the sinner to find the face of God.

From such a perspective, we can more readily ascertain the wisdom found in employing the Golden Rule in every aspect of our lives and why Christ further expanded upon that tenet by adding:

---

[12] Mother Teresa (1910–1997) was an Albanian-Indian Roman Catholic nun and missionary, canonized by Pope Francis in 2016 as Saint Teresa of Calcutta.

[13] Arthur Zajonc is a physicist, professor emeritus at Amherst College, and author of several books focusing on science, mind, and spirit.

> Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do unto me…[14]

If God is the divine face dwelling within each of us, as Mother Teresa insisted, then every judgment, indifference, rejection, rudeness, harassment, insult, deception, dislike, hatred, and all other injuries directed towards anyone else are also injuries that we are unwittingly projecting onto divinity—as well as onto ourselves—perpetually separating and dividing us apart from every other aspect of who we are. In other words, we are cutting ourselves off from our truest nature by refusing to acknowledge God's oneness within everyone and everything.

Moreover, in order to love fully, it is important to point out that helping those in need is a vital part of helping ourselves. When we come across anyone impeded by suffering, sickness, poverty, physical (or mental, or even emotional) imprisonment, all of us who are committed to conscious gardening and to the collective blossoming of love within the mind garden must do what is needed to comfort, nurture, and assist whenever possible. If we reject this important task of conscious gardening, we are also rejecting the presence of divine love in the world. Christ warned all of us when he said:

> …Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these [anyone in need], you did not do for me…[15]

That is why he also insisted:

> …you shall love your neighbor as yourself…[16]

But more importantly:

> …love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you…[17]

And the following passage elaborates even further:

> …For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? [18] And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are

---

[14] From the New Testament, Matthew 25:40.

[15] From the New Testament, Matthew 25:45.

[16] From the Old Testament, Leviticus 19:18.

[17] From the New Testament, Matthew 5:44.

[18] Tax collectors of the day were known to be notoriously dishonest, treacherous, and oftentimes infamous as well.

you doing than others? …Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.[19]

I believe this to be one of the most essential keys for conscious gardening:

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Is this to say that we must be better than everyone else? Of course not. Such an idea would be just another dualistic weed, measuring and separating ourselves from the rest of humanity—ultimately, not making us anywhere near being perfect. Actually, to be perfect is not a degree of greatness or a measurement of striving to be superior, it is simply living in a veritable condition of divine love.

Consequently, only when we are truly compassionate can we also act and perceive perfectly. This is what we are supposed to be practicing and accomplishing throughout the entirety of our lives:

Practice all of our thoughts and actions to be always perfectly loving.

Indeed, there is no other true perfection. Anything else is a contrivance strapped upon the dualistic seesaws of faultlessness versus fault, right versus wrong, and greatness versus insignificance.

Not only did the rabbi of Nazareth declare that he was one with his Father, but he also referred to all of us as his brothers and sisters who would do greater things than he has done. Because when we practice perfecting a life exclusively lived in love, we are all one with God. Jesus amplified the importance of this thought when he said:

…I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you…[20]

From out of a clearly different cultural and more recent historical setting, a humble monk appeared in Southeast Asia who also advocated for us to instill this same compassionate belief within our hearts, and then propel it outward into the world towards all others. This remarkable monk was the late Thich Nhat Hanh.[21]

---

[19] From the New Testament, Matthew 5:46–48.
[20] From the New Testament, John 14:20.

[21] Thich Nhat Hanh (1926–2022) was a Vietnamese Buddhist monk. Aside from eventually becoming a Zen master, he was a peace activist, prolific author, and poet. During the latter part of his teenage years, he learned to speak three languages in addition to his native Vietnamese: Chinese, French, and English. In 1960, he was awarded a Fulbright scholarship and

In his book *Peace is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*, Nhat Hanh expressed a point of view that should remind us of what Mother Teresa spoke about while she visited those inmates on death row. When we look into the eyes of any other being, and—if we look deeply enough—we will not only see the pain, suffering, and fears of all our brothers or sisters from across the globe hiding there, but we will witness the actual face of God and (ironically) our own reflection as well. This is unarguably the case if we truly comprehend the meaning of what Christ stated above when he referred to the oneness between God-the-Father, himself, and all others.

The following is an excerpt from the aforementioned book *Peace is Every Step*, expanding further on this type of understanding:

> In Plum Village, where I live in France, we receive many letters from the refugee camps in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, hundreds each week. It is very painful to read them, but we have to do it, we have to be in contact. We try our best to help, but the suffering is enormous, and sometimes we are discouraged. It is said that half the boat people die in the ocean. Only half arrive at the shores in southeast Asia, and even then they may not be safe.
>
> There are many young girls, boat people, who are raped by sea pirates. Even though the United Nations and many countries try to help the government of Thailand prevent that kind of piracy, sea pirates continue to inflict much suffering on the refugees. One day we received a letter telling us about a young girl on a small boat who was raped by a Thai pirate. She was only twelve, and she jumped into the ocean and drowned herself.
>
> When you first learn of something like that, you get angry at the pirate. You naturally take the side of the girl. As you look more deeply you will see it differently. If you take the side of the little girl, then it is easy. You only have to take a gun and shoot the pirate. But we cannot do that.

---

subsequently studied comparative religion at Princeton University. And seven years later, in 1967, he was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize by Martin Luther King Jr.

Nhat Hanh founded the Plum Village Monastery in southwestern France in 1982. From there, he traveled extensively around the world to teach, hold retreats, and give talks. After being exiled from Vietnam for vocally opposing the Vietnam War and refusing to take sides back in the sixties, he was eventually permitted to visit his homeland again thirty-nine years later in 2005. Finally, in late 2018, he returned to Vietnam permanently and remained there until his death in January 2022. Nhat Hanh was 95.

In my meditation I saw that if I had been born in the village of the pirate and raised in the same conditions as he was, there is a great likelihood that I would become a pirate. I saw that many babies are born along the Gulf of Siam, hundreds every day, and if we educators, social workers, politicians, and others do not do something about the situation, in twenty-five years a number of them will become sea pirates. That is certain. If you or I were born today in those fishing villages, we may become sea pirates in twenty-five years. If you take a gun and shoot the pirate, you shoot all of us, because all of us are to some extent responsible for this state of affairs.

After a long meditation, I wrote this poem. In it, there are three people: the twelve-year-old girl, the pirate, and me. Can we look at each other and recognize ourselves in each other? The title of the poem is "Please Call Me by My True Names," because I have so many names. When I hear one of these names, I have to say, "Yes."

Do not say that I will depart tomorrow
because even today I still arrive.

Look deeply: I arrive in every second
to be a bud on a spring branch,
to be a tiny bird, with wings still fragile,
learning to sing in my new nest,
to be a caterpillar in the heart of a flower,
to be a jewel hiding itself in a stone.

I still arrive, in order to laugh and to cry,
in order to fear and to hope.
The rhythm of my heart is the birth and
death of all that are alive.

I am the mayfly metamorphosing on the surface of the river,
and I am the bird which, when spring comes, arrives in time to eat the mayfly.

I am the frog swimming happily in the clear pond,
and I am also the grass-snake who, approaching in silence, feeds itself on the frog.

I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones,
my legs as thin as bamboo sticks,
and I am the arms merchant, selling deadly weapons to Uganda.

I am the twelve-year-old girl, refugee on a small boat,
who throws herself into the ocean after being raped by a sea pirate,
and I am the pirate, my heart not yet capable of seeing and loving.

I am a member of the politburo, with plenty of power in my hands,
and I am the man who has to pay his "debt of blood" to my people,
dying slowly in a forced labor camp.

My joy is like spring, so warm it makes flowers bloom in all walks of life.
My pain is like a river of tears, so full it fills the four oceans.

Please call me by my true names,
so I can hear all my cries and laughs at once,
so I can see that my joy and pain are one.

Please call me by my true names,
so I can wake up,
and so the door of my heart can be left open,
the door of compassion.

Each one of these depictions emphasizes our true nature of oneness and the interconnectedness we share with each other, including divinity itself. Yet, we can only become aware of this perfected cohesion when our truest yearnings direct us to behave as conscious gardeners who forever weed away all the dualistic judgments from this seemingly cruel and chaotic life, and exclusively nurture the flowers of love in all our thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions.

II.

The mind gardener's directive...

> Do everything you have to do, but not with greed,
> not with ego, not with lust, not with envy,
> but with love, compassion, humility, and devotion.[22]

On May 25, 2022—in Dharmsala, India—the Dalai Lama emphasized a universal need for all of humanity to practice divine love as a requirement of life. He expressed his deep concern with these cautionary words:

> Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive...
>
> Our prime purpose in this life is to help others. And if you can't help them, at least don't hurt them.

Likewise, the distinguished astronomer Carl Sagan offered a similar admonition. In the following passage from his book *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space*, he remarks on the countless struggles we fabricate and engage in on our tiny planet; and he described this insignificant earthen orb as being a remote, isolated particle disconnected from all else by the seemingly limitless expanses stretching out across the universe as a celestial void. However, such immeasurable spatiality only divides us while we adhere to our conventional, dualistic beliefs about space and time and the illusory distances that delineate everything as being separate from everything else.

He warned of humanity's destructive and self-centered inclinations and also suggested that there are no alien species (as far as we know currently) who will come and save humankind from its own shortsightedness. Moreover, he urged us to be kinder and more compassionate,

[22] From the Bhagavad Gita.

hinting that this might be the only way for us to endure:[23]

> Look again at that dot. That's here, that's home, that's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader," every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there—on the mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.
>
> The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that, in glory and triumph, they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner, how frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds.
>
> Our posturings [*sic*], our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.
>
> The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. Visit, yes. Settle, not yet. Like it or not, for the moment the Earth is where we make our stand.

---

[23] The backstory for Sagan's observations has been posted on the website of the Planetary Society <www.planetary.org> and are mentioned again here:

> The following excerpt from Carl Sagan's book *Pale Blue Dot* was inspired by an image taken, at Sagan's suggestion, by Voyager 1 on 14 February 1990. As the spacecraft was departing our planetary neighborhood for the fringes of the solar system, it turned [itself] around for one last look at its home planet.
>
> Voyager 1 was about 6.4 billion kilometers (4 billion miles) away, and approximately 32 degrees above the ecliptic plane, when it captured this portrait of our world [*the image has been displayed on the Planetary Society's website*]. Caught in the center of scattered light rays (a result of taking the picture so close to the Sun), Earth appears as a tiny point of light, a crescent only 0.12 pixel in size.

> It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known.

To conclude this section of the chapter, I would like to recount a humorous story that describes how a wise teacher provoked his student into loving more fully—as if it were his last chance to do so. In the following passage from Amit Goswami's *Physics of the Soul*, the author speaks of a purported dialogue between the legendary mystic Tukaram[24] and one of his followers:

> A disciple inquired of Tukaram about how his transformation came, how he never got angry, how he was always loving, and… he wanted to know Tukaram's "secret."
>
> "I don't know what I can tell you about my secret," said Tukaram, "but I know your secret."
>
> "And what secret is that?" the disciple asked curiously.
>
> "You are going to die in a week," said Tukaram gravely.
>
> Since Tukaram was a great sage, the disciple took his words seriously. During the next week, he cleaned up his act. He treated his family and friends lovingly. He meditated and prayed. He did everything he could in preparation for his death.
>
> On the seventh day, he lay down on his bed, feeling weak, and sent for Tukaram. "Bless me, sage, I'm dying," he said.
>
> "My blessing is always with you," said the sage, "but tell me how you've been spending the last week? Have you been angry with your family and friends?"
>
> "Of course not. I had only seven days to love them. So that's what I did. I loved them

[24] A seventeenth-century Hindu poet and *sant** often referred to as Sant Tukaram Maharaj, Santshreshta, Jagadguru, Tukoba, or Tukobaraya.

According to *Wikipedia*:

> In Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, a *sant** is a human being revered for his or her knowledge of "self, truth, reality" and as a "truth-exemplar". In Sikhism it is used to describe a being who has attained spiritual enlightenment… through the union with the monotheistic God.

intensely," said the disciple.

"Now you know my secret," exclaimed the sage. "I know that I can die at any time. So I am always loving to all my relationships."

We cannot be certain of Tukaram's exact intention when he used the word *relationships*. After all, this word written in English is only an attempt at a modern-day equivalency for the term originally expressed by the sage—recorded in his mother tongue centuries ago. It is possible that he was only speaking about his immediate family and close friends. It could also mean that he intended to include his followers and acquaintances as well. But as a profound spiritual thinker, he most likely intended to include everyone that he ever came across during his lifetime. By the same token, he may have suggested only friends and family simply to make it simpler for teaching an untrained follower to focus on merely the most fundamental form of love—something which even someone who was relatively unpracticed in loving could accomplish.

However, for anybody to love and watch over only the closest people who we see every day, it is definitely a good place to start; but our compassionate behavior must never end there. After all, as I mentioned in the preceding section of this chapter, Christ had indicated that we should love even *our enemies*.

Hence, the implication is obvious. We should be practicing our ability to love everyone consistently, regardless of who they are. Because, if we simply love those who are closest to us (that is to say, the relationships we hold the most dear), then we are only reinforcing a separating illusion of selective *love* that will just create more dualistic weeds for our garden—additional brush and bracken needing to be extracted so the veritable flowers of divine love might ultimately flourish.

III.

Opting not to suffer...

To fulfill our true purpose as conscious and compassionate caretakers of our own lives—including the apparent physical-reality aspect with which we interact—it is crucial (as mentioned previously) that the entirety of what we think, what we believe, what we intend, and what we do are motivated by and acted out through divine love exclusively. Within the limitless bounds of the mind garden, it is imperative therefore that we cultivate our richest and most refined perceptions of love possible as the garden's only soil; so within that soil, all seeds, roots, stalks, branches, leaves, and flowers will rise upward into countless materialized expressions of that love.

Yet, how do we accomplish such a monumental and seemingly impossible task? As with the creation of anything, we must approach it with one mindful step after another. It is true that some might adamantly reject the idea of everything being conceived solely from divine love. They believe that a world expressing universal compassion would lead to nothing more than a static, uneventful, and boring existence. Without the challenges of conflict, adversity, and sorrow, they also might argue that there would be nothing to spark humanity to fulfill its most lasting and beneficial achievements.

However, such a scenario can only be visualized by those already blinded by the duplicitous delusions in which they have already enmeshed themselves. In actuality, the flowers, fruits, vegetables, and herbs found within this garden of divine love flourish as oneness brimming paradoxically with *dynamic diversity*. Differences are only dualistic, divided, and dividing when we conceive each of them to remain apart from all else; and such perceptions only exist where love has been overrun and buried by dichotomous weeds, which cause the actual illusion of separateness.

When we examine our world and wonder why almost all living creatures systematically inflict hurt and suffering upon one another, even when many of those injuries are meted out unintentionally and (at least, within the human community) supposedly in the name of love or for the sake of family, community, or country, it is well to realize that this condition is just

another guise of dualistic weeds running rampantly and untended throughout our mind garden.

Yet, despite their seemingly undesirable attributes, anguish and misery also can teach us inadvertently how to become wiser, more compassionate, and recalibrate our own erroneous bearings so as to direct us back into loving once again with a unifying love. Or, as is resonated by the old adage:

> Suffering can make us wise.

That is to say, enduring the pangs of sorrow and grief may give us insights into how we might improve our lives, our interactions with others, and how we treat ourselves if we examine that grief mindfully.

But the path to wisdom found through suffering tends to come only after we acquire enough faith to believe in the usefulness of that suffering—and consequently, to learn from it. Because suffering often brings us into a place of total darkness, our capacity to perceive with our rational mind often becomes deactivated; and it is then when we can *surrender* to sorrow's unique and dualistically contrived manner of blindness. However, it is also at such times when any of our earlier practices of faith become most useful, for faith can act as the torchlight that guides us through the midnight of our sorrows.

The Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard[25] spoke of this in his 1847 work *Uplifting Discourses in Various Spirits*. His commentary on such ideas can be found within a profound segment entitled "The Gospel of Suffering":

> The believer humanly comprehends how heavy the suffering is, but in faith's wonder that is beneficial to him, he devoutly says: It is light. Humanly he says: It is impossible, but he says it again in faith's wonder that what he humanly cannot understand is beneficial to him. In other words, when sagacity is able to perceive the beneficialness, then faith cannot see God; but when in the dark night of suffering sagacity cannot see a handbreadth ahead of it, then faith can see God, since faith sees best in the dark.

However, once we readily acquire from our pains and sorrows an ample amount of wisdom, there eventually comes a transformational realization. We finally discover (when we are truly wise enough) that suffering is no longer needed. As several decades have passed since

[25] Søren Kierkegaard was a Danish theologian, religious writer, philosopher, poet, and social critic (1813–1855). He died from tuberculosis at the young age of forty-two.

I first became aware of this possibility, an additional insight came to me in more recent times (although has been mentioned earlier in varied and less complete ways, I repeat it here in a more comprehensive form):

> *The only wisdom that removes all dualities, including those in which suffering plays a part, is a wisdom conceived exclusively through divine love. Any perception without love simply remains a dual fabrication proliferating countless tugs-of-war between harmony and hatred, success and failure, wisdom and ignorance, elation and misery, pleasure and pain.*
>
> *If any part of these dichotomies actually seems to shield us from suffering for a time, it is nothing more than an illusion that the positive end of our cosmic seesaw contrives temporarily while countering and competing with the negative side. It superficially lures us away from each underlying hurt that actually needs to be permanently healed and balanced with an ultimate compassion instead. But in actuality, it will merely sow more seeds yielding a diverse assortment of more dualistic weeds.*

How many times during our lives have we heard others protest bitterly about how a truly beneficent, loving, and all-powerful God would never permit all of the unspeakable atrocities and anguishes occurring daily throughout the world? In fact, we may—if only for a time—be among those who have lodged similar complaints. Or, many of us may have even cast away our spiritual faith altogether because earthly woes continue to thrive unimpeded. Consequently, it might even lead a good deal of us to assume that a higher power simply does not exist, considering the vast number of horrific sufferings continuing to plague all of humanity.

However, this condition exists because our world is blinded by the illusion denying the presence of God—devoid of divine love—and it shouldn't compel us to alienate ourselves from (or reject the existence of) the divine. Instead, as long as we persist in practicing the continuance of duality, suffering always will bare its lethal fangs to all those who rise and fall upon any number of our turbulent and perplexing *seesaws* concerning whether there actually is a God or simply no God instead.

When we are sailing high amid success, privilege, power, prosperity, and good health, many of us fail to see the signs of suffering, tragedy, illness, and sorrow skulking within the unbalanced and unbalancing shrouds of confusion that opposites constantly thrust upon each other (masking the inevitable shifts required by our dichotomous existence as weeds)

combatting and competing with all other weeds around and within us. After all, there is the ancient proverb aptly describing all of those endless ups and downs we face upon the cosmic seesaw—those cyclical, repetitive illusions ensnaring everyone who persists in clinging to duality:

The wheel is always turning.

While we gaze upward into the fathomless night sky and fervently pray to a God who seems so far away from ourselves, we are only perpetuating the illusion of an artificial face of divinity that remains forever elusive and unattainable. Appearing to reside in an unreachable domain (one which seems to exist exclusively on the opposite, inaccessible side of yet another seesaw of duality, this distant deity frequently appears unwilling or unable to aid us or answer our prayers. As I have already mentioned in an earlier chapter, such notions deceive a great portion of humanity into believing that God remains forever apart from our lives—separated by great and unsurmountable distances.

In truth, it isn't any divine being who must be blamed for the continuance of this sort of *illusion* (of all earthly sufferings), nor should our miseries invalidate the reality of an all-encompassing divinity whose benign and inexorable influence pervades the cosmos. We instead are the ones responsible for each agony we experience, because most of us do not know how to end our addictive dependence upon and the ambivalent acceptance of opposites opposing one another in their self-perpetuating deception of apparent separation. In short, we obliviously continue to partake of the dualistic fruit from the Tree of Good and Evil.

Does this mean that each of us should ignore the plights of others because they ostensibly have caused their own misery—consequently, needing to sort it out for themselves? Of course this isn't the case. If we behave with indifference or act in judgment of what has actually caused anyone else's sufferings, we simply continue to isolate ourselves from them. We are propagating more dualities that perpetually oppose oneness through our own divisive, well-practiced judgments that spawn apathy, neglect, and even contempt or outright hostility.

While so doing, we riddle the burgeoning landscape of the mind garden with an endless array of more weeds. Moreover, we are abandoning our duty as conscious gardeners to practice and promote exclusively the blossoming of compassionate love.

When divine intervention seems to allude much of humankind, to blame God for the constant chaos in our lives is nothing more than sowing further seeds of division between

humanity and celestial sanctity. It is actually another subtle variation of the *I'm-right-you're-wrong* syndrome. Our viewpoint (expressing how intolerable the existing personal, local, national, or worldwide mayhems are) have to be the right point of view, while any loving God not willing or able to intervene certainly is in the wrong and therefore cannot be considered reliable or even real.

By continually practicing these types of attitudes and beliefs, we endorse, maintain, and manifest an allegedly deified supreme consciousness forever remaining paradoxically invisible and inaccessible to ourselves and to all others. Yet, when we recognize that "the kingdom of God is within",[26] then the well-practiced habit of removing and isolating our human identity from the true oneness of all things becomes apparent. Any thought inciting perceptions of a quarantined deity (opposite and apart from each of us), can be nothing other than a predictable precursor for a multitude of cosmic seesaws to manifest unending anguish, despair, and disaster on the negative, *opposing* sides of any such dualistic *planks*.

Despite all negations about the legitimacy of our innate interconnectedness with the all-encompassing divinity of love, throughout human history there always were countless individuals who actually dared to *jump off* of duplicity's insidious seesawing ride. They weeded out duality from their lives by actually beginning to sow seeds of balance, oneness, and compassionate love back into their world once again.

Many times, such individuals were seen as charlatans, false prophets, blasphemers, and heretics because their ideas were perceived as being radically different from the currently accepted and politically endorsed interpretation of scriptural law—those which were predictably dualistic interpretations, of course. Therefore, anyone who seemingly defied those condoned viewpoints of any then-current religious majority almost always were condemned as being a threat to the status quo.

Many of them subsequently were imprisoned, tortured, and even murdered. Their accusing tormenters were those of us who were bound so tightly upon their own dualistic seesaws that they couldn't respond in any way other than with countless fear-ridden, judgmental, and hateful reactions—dictating whatever they thought, felt, and did.

However, divine love never takes part in such behavior. It is essential to remind ourselves continually:

[26] From Luke 17:21 in the New Testament.

> Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.[27]

In his book *The Self-Aware Universe*, Amit Goswami tells of several historical figures who transcended above the weeds of duality to proclaim their oneness with the divine and with the divinity residing in all things:

> The Christian mystic Catherine Adorna of Genoa, who lived in fifteenth-century Italy, simply and beautifully stated her knowledge: "My being is God, not by simple participation, but by a true transformation of my being."
>
> The great Hui-Neng of sixth-century China, an illiterate peasant whose sudden illumination eventually resulted in the founding of Zen Buddhism, declared: "Our very self-nature is Buddha, and apart from this nature there is no other Buddha."
>
> The twelfth-century Sufi mystic Ibn al-Arabi, revered by Sufis as the Sheikh of sheikhs, had this to say: "Thou art neither ceasing to be nor still existing. Thou art He, without one of these limitations. Then if thou knew thine own existence thus, then thou knowest God; and if not, then not."
>
> The fourteenth-century Kabbalist Moses de Leon, probably the author of the Zohar, which is the primary sourcebook for Kabbalists, wrote: "God…when he has just decided to launch upon his work of creation is called He. God in the complete unfolding of his Being, Bliss and Love, in which he becomes capable of being perceived by the reasons of the heart … is called You. But God, in his supreme manifestation, where the fullness of His Being finds its final expression in the last and all-embracing of his attributes, is called I."
>
> The eighth-century mystic Padmasambhava is credited with bringing Tantric Buddhism to Tibet. His consort, the charismatic Yeshe Tsogyel, expressed her wisdom this way: "But when you finally discover me, the one naked Truth arisen from within, Absolute Awareness permeates the universe."
>
> Meister Eckhart, the thirteenth-century Dominican monk, wrote: "In this breaking-through I receive that God and I are one. Then I am what I was, and then I neither diminish

[27] From I John 4:8, in the New Testament.

> nor increase, for I am then an immovable cause that moves all things."
>
> From the tenth-century Sufi mystic Monsoor al-Halaj came the pronouncement: "I am the Truth!"
>
> The eighth-century Hindu mystic Shankara exuberantly expressed his realization: "I am reality without beginning, without equal. I have no part in the illusion of *I* and *you*, *this* and *that*. I am Brahman, one without a second, bliss without end, the eternal, unchanging truth… I dwell within all beings as the soul, the pure consciousness, the ground of all phenomena, internal and external. I am both the enjoyer and that which is enjoyed. In the days of my ignorance, I used to think of these as being separate from myself. Now I know that I am All."
>
> And finally, Jesus of Nazareth declared: "My father and I are one."

No doubt, there are certain passionate followers of some faiths who might shake their heads in dismay while reading through many of the above quotes. Definitely, those aligned with more fundamental factions of Christianity would condemn almost all of these statements as being unchristian and perhaps proclaim them also to be:

> The work of the devil.

Such judgmental and shortsighted declarations undoubtedly could be incited by a misinterpretation of Christ's pronouncement that we can only come to [God] the Father through him,[28] and that no one can be divine other than the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

But the idea that Jesus Christ was born divine into this world definitely wasn't by his own admission. This instead happened to be a view that took hundreds of years to be actually established firmly as the incontestable belief asserted through evolving church doctrine.

It in fact didn't become an official creed—Jesus being God in human form—until the fourth century. Despite whether or not some higherups in the Christian faith essentially devised such a religious dogma to gain political supremacy over other religious beliefs by making the central

[28] From the New Testament, John 14:5–6. The disciple Thomas was conversing with Jesus in the following segment of dialogue:

> "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

figure of their sect incontrovertibly supreme, if he truly were divine at birth (and was totally omniscient and omnipotent throughout his mortal life on earth), he never would have called out to his father in heaven with the following cry of abandonment and despair while being nailed to the cross:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? [29]

Perhaps, in his final moments of exquisite pain, isolation, and anguish, he simply was trying to find comfort in the words of the great psalmist King David from centuries past. After all, it was a common teaching in Judaism at the time for rabbis to teach their followers to recite Psalm 22 whenever they felt like the spirit of God had left them. Regardless of this practice, would a truly living manifestation of *God-made-flesh* ever need to express these words of alienation, abandonment, and faith lost by voicing such a plea—one which expressed an ultimate and total separation from the divine?

We must remember that Jesus indeed was a Jewish rabbi and most likely was recalling a song that he had certainly been taught in childhood to recite by heart. To call up a prayer or comforting song is something many of us find consolation in doing whenever we find ourselves in a hopeless and desperate situation:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.
In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.
To you they cried, and were saved;
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

But I am a worm, and not human;
scorned by others, and despised by the people.
All who see me mock at me;
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;

[29] From the New Testament, Matthew 27:46.

"Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver—
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"

Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.
On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.
Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help…[30]

Indeed, if his divine nature already were fully realized, there would be no need to question God with something to which he always would have known the answer with surety. So, was his divinity at birth a bona fide reality or a political devise conceived by later church leaders—perhaps for the sake of power and wielding control over their constituents?

In any case, what does the argument over literal or figurative divinity at birth actually have to do with divine love—the primary attribute which supposedly is at the heart of all church principles? Indeed, judgment or condemnation of one tenet over the other simply is just another insidious manifestation of the *I'm-right-you're-wrong* weeds of duality.

There are questions like those mentioned above that crop up in every religion. Similar semantical and interpretive dilemmas also appear in the sciences, in the arts, and in every other human endeavor in existence. Fundamentalist interpretations in any faith or belief structure always claim to be literal and therefore the most accurate ones by those who endorse these things.

But how can there be any truly literal understanding when a majority of such written works are often derived from translations? This especially is problematic when it comes to understanding sacred writings and definitely creates a predicament for those who base their so-called *literal* assertions on such interpretations. Translations never can be truly literal at all, because they are nothing more than subjective evaluations of words and ideas expressed in another language, culture, and varying times and places.

Furthermore, translators in the past often had political agendas since they regularly worked for or were subsidized by governmental or religious organizations of the day that wielded great power. Similarly, any really excellent translator often has to take leaps of faith

[30] From the Old Testament, Psalm 22:1–11.

out of literal content in order to get a real sense of what was written in an ancient, foreign tongue. It was also essential to consider idioms, cultural sensibilities, social customs, and regional laws of the time in order to get a reasonably accurate rendition of the original text.

Until fairly recent times, Biblical interpretations tended to be extracted much more figuratively, where symbolism and allegory were considered to be vital aspects for true comprehension. It is also essential to understand that much of spiritual texts were created in the form of poetic, metaphorical, and ecstatic musings anyway. Only in the last couple of hundred years has there come to be an almost obsessive preoccupation with literal meaning—even though much of any literal interpretation tends not to be taken literally throughout the entirety of whatever work is being studied or preached.

Oftentimes there is so much symbolic and mystical content in scriptural phraseology that it becomes impossible to be expressed with veritable exactitude in a great number of instances. Additionally, so-called *literalists* pick and choose what expressions, religious tenets, and spiritual ideals are to be interpreted verbatim. They subsequently practice believing, implementing, instructing, and disseminating those beliefs as such.

If any presumed literal accuracy cannot be maintained one hundred percent of the time, then an actual fundamentalist premise must in fact be none other than the makings of a veritable *non-fundamentalism* or *pseudo-fundamentalism*. This definitely is true when even the slightest figurative preference is inserted to coincide conveniently with a desired and prescribed fundamentalist interpretation-of-the-moment. Whenever specific groups or individuals attempt to insist that their beliefs and understandings supersede all others, they are doing nothing other than self-righteously proclaiming the dualistic litany of:

We are always right and everyone else is wrong.

Furthermore, much of spiritual texts found in most religions were not written down by their original authors. They instead were transmitted by word-of-mouth, oftentimes for generations. And we all know what can happen then. Who hasn't seen the drastically distorted results in a simple game of *telephone*? This is where even a handful of participants sit in a circle. Someone then commences the *telephoning* procedure by whispering a sentence or phrase to one player sitting in an adjacent seat. In turn, that contributor whispers the same phrase to the next player in the circle. This process continues until everyone has transmitted the quietly muttered message to everyone partaking in this ongoing *phone conversation*.

Finally, the last person repeats aloud what he or she has heard. Almost never is the final rendering of the statement identical to the one first uttered at the beginning of the game. In fact, that final rendition of the *message* oftentimes ends up as unintelligible gibberish or something completely foreign and even contradictory to the intention of and the underlying meaning beneath that original message.

Regardless, there are many things in the Bible (which if taken literally) do not hold up under scrutiny. For example, the prophesy concerning the birth of the Messiah proclaims that the Savior would appear out of the bloodline of David. When genealogical lists are provided in scripture, they actually indicate that Joseph is a direct descendant of David, and David's line is traced all the way back to Adam.

Also, it is important to note that today's understanding of the words *Son of God* could be completely misinterpreted and therefore creating a serious misunderstanding of earlier beliefs. Such a misunderstanding therefore endorses and requires adherence to beliefs that—fundamentally speaking—are totally unfounded:[31]

> Jews expected the Messiah, the anointed one, to be a descendant of King David, who, as king and spiritual leader, had founded the first independent Jewish kingdom in Jerusalem. The Psalms sometimes called David or the Messiah "the Son of God," but that was simply a way of expressing his intimacy with Yahweh.[32] Nobody since the return from Babylon had imagined that Yahweh actually had a son, like the abominable deities of the *goyim*.[33]

Additionally, if we also accept the prophetic text declaring Mary's *immaculate* conception—and subsequent pregnancy—to be brought about by divine impregnation rather than by her husband Joseph, then David's line has nothing to do with the actual (or literal) birth of Christ. If this were the case, then Joseph undeniably never could be the real *blood* father of Jesus.

There are certain interpretations that can justify the validity of both prophesies nevertheless, but they are more emblematic in nature; and therefore cannot be claimed as part of a truly fundamentalist or purely literal doctrine. In fact, a genuine literalist must admit that

---

[31] The following quote is taken from Chapter 3 of Karen Armstrong's bestselling book *A History of God: the 4,000-year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*.

[32] *Yahweh* is the name in Hebrew for the God of the Israelites.

[33] This is a Jewish reference to Gentiles or non-Jews.

Jesus simply cannot be the Messiah based on these particular discrepancies alone.

Otherwise, Joseph most emphatically must be the real *blood* father for Jesus' birth to corroborate the Messianic prophesy literally. But such an admission essentially discredits Biblical accounts of a factual *divine birth* proclaiming a mystically impregnating union between the Holy Spirit and Mary—thereby supporting the claim of Jesus' divinity at birth—with Joseph having played absolutely no part in the conception of that divine child. However, to acknowledge these inconsistencies obviously invalidates altogether the legitimacy of absolute literalism in Christian doctrine and also raises the question of the factual meaning of the *Son of God*.

So, while we remain blinded by our own semantical interpretations (or assumptions) that we cannot accept or love beyond our own limited viewpoint, then divine love will continue to evade us. Consequently, we will most definitely adhere to our weed-ridden thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and actions that perpetuate the seemingly endless scripts and scenarios of mortal suffering while simultaneously keeping us apart from our veritable reality of unending peace, happiness, and divine love.

IV.

When "hallucinations" heal...

During the past several decades, I have made seemingly instantaneous recoveries from a myriad of acute illnesses. Occasionally, various long-term bouts would disappear quite suddenly; and the few people who actually witnessed those remarkable transformations readily exclaimed them as being virtually impossible to explain or comprehend. It were as though some of the most habitual and extreme symptoms would simply vanish for long periods of time—even for years. And in a few exceptional instances, they would never burden me again.

In the following segment, I will recount only one such case. Although there were dozens of times when I was extremely sick and then recuperated very quickly—at times, even in a

matter of minutes without the aid of doctors or drugs—this particular occurrence has always been for me one of the most memorable.

Almost all of such enigmatic *healings* took place while various other mystical phenomena were also happening simultaneously, but it would take an entire book to recount each incident fully. That is why I hope the following description will be sufficient enough to illustrate how various liberating visions or (as some might insist) *hallucinations* can be a pivotal influence in restoring body, mind, and spirit. And with ample practice and conviction, they should potentially be accessible to everyone.

As was mentioned earlier, throughout my youth and into the beginning of adulthood, I was plagued with a diverse assortment of afflictions. But there was one in particular that adversely affected my ability to practice the piano like none other. Obviously, it also interfered with every other task requiring an ample amount of finger dexterity and hand coordination.

But since my main focus in life was to work at the keyboard daily for six hours on average, this particular problem challenged my musical endeavors to such a degree that I couldn't help but to lose heart at times. Nevertheless, each morning began with my dogged efforts to persevere through pain and the pervasive stiffness confronting me. Unless these nearly ever-present obstacles were compounded by the most stringent of fevers, I almost always fulfilled each daily practice objective with fortitude and conviction.

Yet, without an ample dose of deep-rooted stubbornness propelling each of those practice sessions, I doubt that merely my love of music and dedication towards the piano alone could have sustained this demanding routine. The hampering effects of chronic illness were compounded by more short-term disorders as well. Frequently, they all interfered with my ability to work optimally throughout the entirety of each extensive practice session.

While still at a tender age—whenever I mentioned how icy my hands felt—it was definitely not something most people I knew ever took seriously. Even after protesting repeatedly how much the stiffening coldness hurt, one of the most popular, predictable, and often sarcastic was that "I wasn't alone!" Unfortunately, this was only one of many jabs that were made by those around me. Here are a few more that I still remember to this day—basically because all of them were uttered to me repeatedly over the course of many years:

You're such a baby!

Stop being a hypochondriac!

It's just a passing phase!

Grin and bear it!

However, the most frustratingly unhelpful suggestion innumerable others would regularly put upon me was that I was only experiencing *growing pains*. Among this group who mentioned repeatedly this vague *hypothesis* even included a couple of family doctors.

In truth, I did go through sizable growth spurts from the time I was only seven until I reached my ninth birthday, when I actually shot up to five feet ten inches. By then, I was taller than almost every other kid in my class at school; and once I had turned eleven, my permanent adult-height of six feet had been reached. But the glib proclamation about simply having growing pains never explained why the problem persisted for more than a decade after all growth spurts had ended; and it probably would have continued long after that if one extraordinary happening had not eventually occurred.

On the other hand, even while those countless people would ridicule me incessantly for something beyond anyone's understanding or control, my mother, Granny M, and a few others would try to cheer me up by saying something along these lines:

I guess you're just like how the old saying goes: "Cold hands, warm heart!"

But, regardless of sympathy or sarcasm, it definitely was true that I wasn't alone when it came to having cold hands. Just among the people I knew personally, there were many who complained about having them, but each of their conditions was undoubtedly less serious than what I had to endure throughout my childhood and into early adulthood.

Although I'd frequently be mocked and scolded—or simply snubbed altogether—there were obviously still some people who genuinely tried to be of help. They often suggested that perhaps this problem stemmed from poor circulation and I might be able to solve it on my own by simply engaging in more vigorous exercise.

Regardless, growing pains or not, more exercise or not, virtually everyone downplayed or altogether ignored my pleas for help throughout the years and paid little attention until I began protesting more insistently. It wasn't until I forced people to actually feel my hands and witness for themselves how absolutely frigid they were to the touch. This especially brought the point home during mid-summer months when ambient New York temperatures occasionally soared into the nineties.

It was only then when a few eyebrows finally began to raise. After feeling my palms with

their own hands—or if I mustered up enough courage to place my icicled appendages on their cheeks or shoulders—did some people actually express concern. A typical reaction after experiencing my *subzero* palms and fingers for themselves was to let out a gasp of astonishment and exclaim quizzically how my hands literally felt like *ice cubes*. In fact, one particular doctor admitted that he had never in his career touched anyone's hands being so cold as mine.

Along with my becoming more insistent in having folks experience the iciness for themselves, I explained that the extreme chill that they felt when taking hold of my hands wasn't nearly as intense as how they affected me deep inside myself—even in the bones. It seemed like there was a core coldness constantly radiating outward towards the surface of each of my ten fingers and both palms as well. This made the pain so unbearable at times that it regularly prevented me from going to sleep at night.

In addition to this, people began remarking how my hands and feet frequently retained a color that could be described as being none other than an alarming shade of dark purple. Nonetheless, any concerns they might have raised usually faded away quickly. Perhaps, they still didn't actually understand how horrible the problem was, or maybe they simply had no idea what could be done to correct it.

Regrettably, the only long-lasting attention I got came from classmates at school. A few of them teased me mercilessly about how those purple hands of mine *clashed* with my flaming red hair; and once I graduated from elementary school into junior high, the physical symptoms only got worse (along with an upsurge in practical jokes, name-calling, and bullying), all thanks to having my hands occasionally turning a deep mauve along with neon hair on the top of my head—two unconventional features of my physical demeanor occasionally instigating verbal slams, practical jokes, and the sporadic shove into nearby walls or onto floors and sidewalks.

But there was something considerably more affecting to me than even these unwanted harassments. It involved the most important part of my life, which was practicing the piano.

I was often confused and frustrated why it would take me even up to two hours every morning simply to warm up and loosen my fingers while less-serious students were able to play comfortably after only spending a fraction of the time on their limbering exercises. Despite that I was more technically advanced and musically proficient than all of the other piano students I knew at the time, they nevertheless could play with considerably more ease first thing in the morning. It occasionally took me hours to obtain similar flexibility to perform with reliable control and precision as my pain and stiffness slowly became less severe each afternoon.

This observation made me feel as though there was something seriously wrong with me; and indeed there was! However, rather than acknowledging that my physical body was at fault, for years I blindly blamed the problem on a lack of musical ability, even while many teachers and musicians often praised me for my so-called *gifts*.

Despite the conflict that raged within me about whether or not being talented enough to continue studying an instrument, it never once entered my mind to give up practicing the piano. On the contrary, these physical deficits and their ensuing challenges only compelled me to work longer and harder because music had become the most important part of my life early on, and that never changed throughout the decades.

Eventually, as my musical skills grew significantly, I was praised and encouraged by several outstanding performers and renown mentors in the field. A few pointed out that the struggles I was facing were indeed caused by health issues and not for any lack of motivation or musical propensities. The overall stiffness and discomfort remained a continual challenge throughout my younger life—even into my mid-twenties.

One thing upon which mostly everyone agreed was that I had poor circulation in my bodily extremities. Because they always felt absolutely frigid, severe and persistent cramping also became a most dreaded consequence of this debilitating condition.[34]

For years, my hands and feet could sometimes constrict into such tight, deformed-looking *claws* that it was impossible to move any fingers or toes in the slightest. They often became hard as a rock. As I recall now, the longest time needed for my muscles to relax again (so even the most severe constrictions would completely subside) would last up to more than two hours at a stretch.

Likewise, there were periods when this excessive cramping became my constant companion. After having to suffer through those unwanted spells for years, exasperation eventually prompted me to discover that the most effective way to end the *death-grip* of each spasm was to take my unaffected hand, make a fist with it, and begin carefully striking into the most affected areas of the other hand. (A similar approach was used when a foot was cramping instead.) Once I discovered the most effective technique for alleviating the actual constrictions,

[34] At this juncture, anyone reading the above description of my condition might assume that I had some sort of arthritis. Certainly, there were several symptoms possibly indicating such a malady, but my mother and I were assured by several physicians that the most obvious indicators of the disease simply were not present, so they never even bothered to send me to a specialist who might know better. Because my parents totally trusted them and took them at their word, they never considered getting an opinion from someone who had more experience dealing exclusively with such maladies. Consequently, those glib assessments of *my simply having growing pains* remained the accepted diagnosis until after I grew up, got married, and finally moved to the mountains in New Hampshire.

I also found increasingly effective ways to reduce the duration and intensity of each attack.

As these challenges were persisting, I took it upon myself to gradually extend the time I spent exercising. Even though I did boost my physical activity noticeably, the change in routine still had little effect on warming my extremities or reducing the frequency of those abnormal muscular constrictions; and when some improvements essentially did come about, those elusive gains were slight and short-lived—usually disappearing within hours. Even as my workouts became more strenuous in my mid-twenties (while I engaged in more arduous sports such as cycling, swimming, rowing, and extensive hiking with a heavy pack on my back), the results were basically the same and the cramping tended to become even more severe than before.

It wasn't until the summer before my twenty-fifth birthday, in a single instant, did the incapacitating condition disappear from my body forever. Nonetheless, it didn't happen until after I left college, got married, and ultimately moved to the mountains in New Hampshire. It was only then that a remarkable metamorphosis took place almost instantaneously.

In retrospect, there assuredly were subtle, underlying changes that had been materializing for more than a decade. They most likely were hidden catalysts that permitted the sudden and dramatic shift in my health to manifest in the end. Especially during the half-dozen years before this seemingly miraculous transformation took place, there were several preliminary adjustments in my life that steered me towards a decisive moment of ultimate catharsis.

After all, I did spend multiple hours each day in a state of profound meditation bolstered by prayer and affirmations. Once leaving home and college thereafter, I had more personal control over my diet, so some noticeable gains were also made in that department. All told, I spent many hours daily focusing on the restoration of both body and mind. So when the time came for actual healing to occur, my physical form and mental state were sufficiently prepared to accept any concrete or ethereal circumstances where healing could simultaneously emerge within and around me.

Unquestionably, there were other important factors as well that could have played a role in the eventual and sudden changes permanently affecting my health. After my wife and I had moved to the remote plateau in central New Hampshire during late spring of 1976, it was in that isolated environment where I began to develop reliable night vision and could take unilluminated hikes into the dead of night. There was no light pollution present in the sky because a sizable wilderness area happened to exist right outside of our front door. Conceivably,

it was only because of the remoteness of the place—devoid of the extraneous auditory and visual distractions of both urban and suburban life—that allowed many subtle and elusive aspects of my inner nature to develop and eventually reveal themselves to me.

Although, other chronic conditions affecting my health gradually faded away once we escaped living in more heavily populated and polluted areas further south, I still suffered from this one serious affliction (among several others) that wouldn't go away nor could be alleviated in the slightest. In fact, it continued to worsen. My hands remained as icy and painful as ever.

But in June of 1977 (during the midnight hour of what turned out to be a singularly auspicious moment in my life), something astonishing happened that would alter this particular aspect of my health once and for all. Summertime was fast approaching but temperatures in the mountains still tended to drop into the thirties and lower forties at night.[35] Often falling well below freezing, the thermometer periodically gave readings in the low single digits as well.[36] Occasional snowstorms could blanket the region with up to a foot or two of new snow, even as late as mid-June. Although in more recent years, because of warming trends due to climate change, this no longer has been the case.

Just after dusk on a clear, moonless night, I decided to get up from the piano and take my evening constitutional. Usually, I simply needed to step outside into the deep forestland surrounding our rustic log house. But instead of simply beginning my hike from the front porch as I normally did, an irresistible urge pressed me to get into the car and drive further north—deeper into the White Mountains.

As soon as I swung the door shut and started the engine, my destination suddenly became clear. I would head to a beautiful gorge in Franconia Notch nearly forty minutes away. Although late-night pilgrimages that far from home were not a usual part of my routine, they nevertheless proved to be an invaluable source of inspiration and awareness whenever they did occur. So every time this kind of prompting rose up from within, I almost always yielded to the call; and the ensuing outcomes frequently filled me with inexplicable wonder.

On that particular occasion, it proved to be rather chilly at the onset; and once I entered into the deep ravine where icy waters would rush past me, I could expect the temperatures to be much colder than they were outside of the gorge. In spite of this, something compelled me to dress as though I were taking a stroll on a mid-summer's afternoon.

---

[35] Equivalent to about -1–7 degrees Celsius.
[36] As low as -17 Celsius.

As a rule, common sense always dictated that if I didn't want to start out the trip wearing something heftier, I should always bring my backpack with extra clothing and supplies so as to be prepared for any contingency. But in this rare instance, I felt compelled not to do so. Against all logic (and my normal habit of taking the utmost precautions), I chose to dress scantily while carrying no backpack and bringing no flashlight or headlamp. Quite frankly, if there had been passersby who stumbled upon me during the night, they definitely would have thought my attire to be totally unsuitable and possibly even bizarre. Perhaps, they also might have imagined that I somehow had been mysteriously teleported from some faraway beach resort on a sunny afternoon; or more likely, they could have deduced by my apparel that I was merely certifiable.

When anyone arrives at the nearest trailhead where I normally parked, it takes about a twenty- to thirty-minute walk just to reach the lower entrance of the gorge. Once having accomplished this, the path continues along an extensive, zigzagging boardwalk. Most of the time, the elevated structure is directly attached to one or the other of two massive, red granite walls on either side. But, there are times when that well-constructed track crosses over turbulent cascades roiling frigidly beneath its wooden planks. Eventually, the unique walkway finally morphs into steep and narrow stairs that wind their way upward, while vertical waves of liquidized thunder descend past them from the opposite direction.

Soon after having trudged upon numerous rampways, stairs, and foot bridges, anyone venturing into this deep and secluded sanctuary will finally come upon a splendid cataract. As the path rises beyond the mists from its plummeting waters, an unexpected staircase soon appears, where solid stone steps ascend to a final egress out of this rousingly beautiful and profound passageway.

After making that final climb to the top, there is an overlook above the ravine's upper end where visitors may gaze wistfully back towards the red-rock ramparts and effervescent waters that have so recently consumed the entirety of their five senses. At least, this is how anyone poetically inclined might describe the place after visiting it simply during normal daylight hours.

However, once the dim lights of twilight flee from sight, that same landscape takes on an entirely different persona altogether. For those not practiced in the art of seeing beyond their own night-blindness, it becomes an insurmountable barrier of black, evoking the most weighty and abysmal fears imaginable.

But paradoxically, for the occasional others who have become friends with nocturnal

lightlessness and who understand how to see within what is unseen, then this domain emerging after nightfall transfigures into a realm of unending wonder and grace. It is a seemingly recurring tabula rasa suddenly overflowing again and again with implausible possibilities of light and miraculous life. It is the intensely mysterious, the vibrantly mystical, and the jubilantly magical. Ultimately, it can unlock an otherwise-elusive entry into the heart of the actual mind garden itself.

On that auspicious night in June when I slipped silently from the parking lot towards the lower mouth of the gorge, a moonless landscape happened to be draped in an entirely different ambiance than what it wore before dusk began only a few hours earlier. The utter darkness was inescapable, and it took several minutes for my night vision to awaken fully.

But before I left the car to begin jaunting into deeper regions of the forest, I first removed shoes and socks, leaving them behind in the trunk of the car. Initially, a chill from heatless pavement stung the soles of both my bare feet. But since these extremities were always freezing anyway, the added cold absorbed from an asphalt parking lot didn't much compound my usual discomfort; and if there had been the slightest, initial jolt of unpleasantness, it didn't last for very long.

In fact, once I reached the roughness of a dirt and gravel path pressing into one foot and then the other, ground friction (along with constant exposure to cold air) tended to stimulate the undersides of my well-calloused feet rather than being an irritation. And in the process, I inwardly felt much more comfortable and invigorated despite how absolutely frozen my feet felt when touched by equally icy hands.

From the many previous experiences I had walking in total darkness, I found it easy to anticipate that, once having left the car to begin my way down an empty pathway, the thoroughly blackened atmosphere around me would predictably light up with vibratory shimmers. They were not only observable to my eyes, but they could actually be *felt* by the naked surfaces of arms, legs, fingers, toes, nose, and cheeks as well. It was as though a dual sense of combined vision and touch unspooled itself into those periodically blind and seemingly vacant surroundings. An ever-present invisibility, brimming over with insentient numbness, expanded and intensified around me to such a degree that (paradoxically) I soon became aware of a radiant realm confronting my senses from every side—with indescribably diverse tones and subtle textures.

Both the silhouette of objects and those adjoining spaces surrounding them were covered

and filled with silvery, white lights. There were an infinite number of glowing points, but they didn't originate from out in the night sky as anyone might otherwise suspect. After all, I was passing through heavily wooded areas with wide and dense canopies overhead.

Yet, there was still another factor that made illuminations from above absolutely impossible. The moonless high altitudes had been clouded over so utterly that not even a single star could flicker through their impenetrable, airborne envelopments.

Nonetheless, the world was shimmering within the bounds of my clear-sighted vision, and penetrating rays of soft, shimmering light gave enough illumination for me to proceed on the path with certainty. There was never any reason for hesitation because enough of the way ahead shown distinctly in a welcoming glow. Normally, our well-established beliefs dictate never to enter total darkness without some sort of artificial illumination to be the guide. But my renegade practice of developing robust and reliable night-sight told me otherwise.

Furthermore, by the time I had reached the lower entrance to the gorge itself, not only was my night vision operating exceptionally well but all of my other senses were also functioning fully and equally alive. Their abilities were heightened unexpectedly to intensities heretofore unattainable. So not only did my recalibrated perceptions of sight transform this black vacuum of darkness into a visual reality of resplendent wonders, but my capacities to hear, touch, smell, and even taste were also enhanced exponentially.

As far as what my ears could hear in those initial moments of entry into the gorge, raging turbulence from the mountain creek understandably filled them with euphoric roars and rumblings. It was amplified further by the echo-inducing surfaces towering upward on either side of the walkway. Each of those massive, cathedralesque[37] walls reiterated countless antiphons intoned beneath them within the rushing flow.

Recent seasonal rainstorms and rapid snowmelt also created temporarily dozens of additional, slender chutes and falls. They dashed and danced dizzily down those vertical red-granite slides. This they did enthusiastically while augmenting further the volume of festive yet swirling frenzies into which they plunged; and all of such joyful chaos I could discern in explicit detail with an increasingly sharpened sense to hear—while also feeling the profound vibrations emitted from their noisiness upon each fiber of my highly sensitized skin.

Besides the obvious clamor, there were more subtle and intricate sounds suddenly

[37] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word *cathedralesque* indicates the "resembling or characteristic of a cathedral".

becoming likewise accessible to my inclinations for listening. Every time I took another step forward through that deep corridor into its most intimate recesses, the waters' intrinsic tendencies towards music-making—with their immeasurable velocities, timbres, amplitudes, pitches, directional shifts, and even variances in both harmonious resonances and white noise alike—rechanneled and recreated themselves in every instant without pause. While sweeping through a wide array of mellifluous themes and elaborate countermelodies, an unseen troupe of submerged soloists rang out relentlessly from within the womb of that overall din.

Whether or not their activities have ever been perceived before in such a manner, I nevertheless heard monumental improvisations of symphonic proportions tirelessly being performed and reinvented in fresh and unexpected recitations. While diligently being carried out throughout my entire time spent there (not only during this particular occasion, but also during every trip I made thereafter), I still imagined that their musical performances persisted far beyond my own comparatively brief excursions into the gorge. Could they have possibly endured not only from that particular dusk until dawn, but also throughout the entire next day unto the setting sun, for countless days thereafter, and into each blessed night in between? Could those sacred songs have been sung conceivably forever?

Above and beyond listening to the constancy of river sounds, there were the infinitely quiet drippings, soft gurgles, and occasional murmurs of unobtrusive liquids descending down the wondrous walls of the chasm. Having first surfaced out of cracks and vertical crevasses formed far above me, their soft trickles and churnings became apparent only as my footsteps came close enough so I might detect their faint and nearly indiscernible voices. Yet, my ears had already become so well-sharpened that I could still distinguish even those subtle *whispers* amid the otherwise overwhelming resonances of the place.

Apart from (yet, in concert with) the intensification of every sight and sound within this illusory pitch blackness, my senses of touch, taste, and smell also seemed to work together so perfectly that I almost couldn't detect whether or not a boundary between each sense actually existed. As the pervasive river-spray clung to every morsel of bare flesh, my sense of touch wasn't simply stimulated in its normal manner, but it was electrified—as was the body in its entirety. This mesmeric encasement of my corporeal form heightened those usual abilities of tongue, nose, and lips as well.

Within each droplet forming upon my legs and arms, I could smell the pleasantly sweet and pungent odors of wet moss, mineralized mists, and the numerous varieties of fir trees

indigenous to the locale. These inescapable fragrances not only filled the air but I could smell them more intensely across the surface of my skin, likewise tasting each of those penetrating scents upon tongue and lips. I instantly became immersed in all five of my senses in a way that I had never experienced before.

But the perceptual surge didn't end in those fleeting moments. Indeed, they lingered on for years and were systematically reinforced whenever I returned to such hallowed places in wilderness areas. It was as though this lone nocturnal visit into the chasm unleashed an entirely magnified set of acuities upon my being. The effects within me were all-consuming, everlasting, and utterly magnificent.

Recounting this incident now reminds me of some words that were cited earlier in the book. When Rabbi Lawrence Kuschner spoke of unchartered domains—both physical and metaphorical—he invited each of us to join him there:

> You can walk where things are predictable or you can enter the wilderness. Without the terror and the joy of the wilderness, there can be neither reverence nor revelation. Sacred wisdom and its prerequisite (reverence, in other words) can only be found in the wilderness—a psycho-spiritual place where it is always and only NOW…

It is true that I felt none of Kuschner's aforementioned *terror* during this particular venture into the gorge, although I definitely did experience his *joy of the wilderness* there. However, a good deal of terrifying moments in rough country certainly happened to me many times before that particular instance ever took place, and there were countless occasions when terrors crept upon me since then.

Perhaps, the reason why it is so essential to face both of these formidable moments while roaming the wilderness is because nothing can insulate us from either of these things there. They are difficult to ignore. We instead cannot be so readily distracted by our electronic devices such as computers, TV's, and cellphones. There are no busy sidewalks with an endless number of storefronts where we can succumb to the temptations of window-shopping, mall-hopping, or people-watching as mindless diversionary tactics of avoidance. Nor are we likely to use non-stop comradery and *partying* with friends as the perennial excuse for not facing the critical lessons of our existence.

But in the wilderness—whether being a tangible, metaphysical, or metaphorical one—we are to meet joy and terror head-on. When we first come face-to-face with them, they normally

confront us as dualistic opposites that we must challenge and ultimately resolve if we wish to break the illusory cycles to which they have bound us. The only way to transcend our own individual brands of dichotomous *pairing* (aside from the aforesaid terror and joy), which also might include agony versus comfort or tribulation versus peace, is not simply to look at them fearlessly in the eye, but to do so with a compassionate heart.

In all of my hundreds and thousands of treks into wilderness areas—equally as physical and metaphysical quests—while exploring simultaneously the externally physical wilderness and the wilds of the interior self, truly cathartic shifts never occurred as an enduring transformation in my life until I could let go of all my self-perpetuating dualistic struggles. It is essential to realize that only by seeing, feeling, thinking, acting, and even breathing (as an ongoing, absolute manifestation of divine love) that we can finally rise above all our terrors and joys; and by so doing, we will awaken into a veritable state of transcendent, resplendent wonders.

Whenever I suddenly decided to drive to a remote and hazardous landscape and hop out of the car to walk barefoot into a potentially treacherous night, it was most definitely not done as a naïve or fanciful whim. If that were the case, there would have been a strong likelihood for me to have never returned alive—or if I did happen to survive, there certainly was a good chance for me to have sustained some serious and possibly permanent injuries.

Simply to engage the wilderness with an overly enthusiastic hubris is definitely something in which we should never partake. Just because we might desire these things (even deeply) doesn't provide us with a justifiable reason for merely going out and doing them impulsively without proper preparation. It would be no different than deciding—since we have a deep faith and truly believe our God is always protecting us—that we should be able to simply step out into highspeed traffic, jump out of a plane without a parachute, or (to use an example having occurred repeatedly during the current coronavirus pandemic of the early 2020's, often resulting in tragedy), go without facemasks, refuse to get vaccinated, and not take any social-distancing precautions whatsoever. To forgo any safeguards while with friends, at work, with extended family members, and at any-sized gatherings because of political disinformation and self-righteous religious assertions, many have put themselves needlessly in harm's way because of a self-righteous, manipulated, or misguided notion that God will be there to protect and save each *true believer* from all harm.

When I think of these somewhat supercilious presumptions, I feel it essential for especially the more overtly zealous Christians (with whom I have come in contact) who have

professed and adhered to these kinds of beliefs and behaviors to be reminded of the story about Christ himself being led into the wilderness and subsequently tempted:

> Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple,
> saying to him, "If you are the son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,
>
> > 'He will command his angels concerning you,'
> > and 'On their hands they will bear you up,
> > so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'
>
> Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' " [38]

When we have enough strength in our spiritual convictions to face the wilderness honestly, we do not need to set up and determine for ourselves what the extreme challenges will be or how we might seek them out to overcome our own pre-orchestrated terrors. Neither should we allow ourselves to face dangerous situations simply because of an impulsive decision to do so. After all, the wilderness will provide us with all the terrors we are meant to face without ever consulting us in advance.

There is an essential difference between being seduced by a casually practiced faith, dilettantish belief, or *wannabe-spirituality* and being truly guided by an enduring, highly exercised, and divinely inspired inner strength and wisdom. As we all should surmise, it takes fortitude, conviction, and ample practice—oftentimes, for years—to be able to differentiate and choose sensibly between the two.

Consequently, facing our wilderness terrors and joys is not something that we can do by merely placing our faith on public display or putting it to a self-appointed or well-rehearsed test. On the contrary, it is a spontaneous and private matter of braving unknown depths of heart and mind with an uncontrived openness and worthy resolve. Nothing else will suffice.

While employing the wilderness as a metaphor for this activity, we could discover those depths to be within the blackness of night or a mountain gorge alive with cascades and cataracts. But they also could be found in a backyard garden, an icon on the wall, a set of rosary beads, an empty chapel, or listening to a kind of music that incites goosebumps or moves us to tears.

Yet, no matter how we choose to enter into wilderness, we must face honestly, prudently,

[38] From the New Testament, Matthew 4:5–7.

and compassionately whatever unknowable emptiness has to offer us personally. This is a crucial way to begin dissolving and transcending our self-perpetuated dualities including our own *terrors and joys*—and any other dichotomous weeds we unwittingly harbor. Ultimately, this process can transmute all of these dualistic duos into veritable love, compassion, and self-sustaining joy in spite of all its seeming paradoxes and inexplicable irrationalities.

Before we return to my walk through the gorge many decades ago, it would be well to keep in mind that the subsequent healing having taken place that night was preceded by years of gradual preparation leading up to a singularly pivotal moment. Although—when it actually did take place—there appeared to be an instantaneous event with no prior preparation beforehand.

We should nevertheless liken such situations to when any plant in our garden first sprouts forth from the soil. It appears to have sprung up overnight. But it is well to recall the extensive gestation period when every seed slowly opens up within its womb of dirt, mud, or sand and secretly extends itself upward, finally breaking past the soil to touch the first light of dawn in what invariably seems to be a mere *twinkling of an eye*.

When Rabbi Kuschner so aptly referred to the wilderness as "a psycho-spiritual place where it is always and only NOW", I have more recently come to see this *psycho-spiritual now-ness* as being akin to Meister Eckhardt's conception of the *eternal Now* (and what I eventually referred to as the *divine within*). When we emerge from the dualistic, diaphanously wafer-thin realm of *Maya* into a veritable reality of divine love's infinite expanse (while facing and resolving our dichotomous terrors and joys we can most readily confront in the wilderness), all of our senses must expand into what they truly are: ever-widening vehicles of inexhaustible perception. They eventually can and will comprehend reality as it truly is.

The deeper I proceeded into the gorge that night, the wilder the waters seemed to churn. Whenever I faced any of those raging torrents directly, the brighter portions of their *whitecaps* glowed iridescently and vibrated in a palatably sensate display of visual, aural, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory marvels. Although I had experienced such phenomena before, this time proved to be far beyond anything I had ever experienced previously.[39] And from that evening forward

[39] Just to be clear, I have never taken any psychotropic drugs in my life whatsoever! These dramatic shifts in sensory performance were simply a byproduct of prayer, affirmations, and an extensive meditational routine—also combined with an extensive development of pervasive thoughts and beliefs encouraging such manifestations to arise.

I have read and heard about dramatic perceptual changes in others who have adhered to similar spiritual practices throughout the centuries. This indeed is nothing new or unheard of when it comes to these types of pursuits.

for many years thereafter, all of my senses continued to develop beyond what is thought to be *normal* in our otherwise-weedy world of dualistic limitations and borderlines.

My footsteps continued to lead me towards larger and more extended cascades—which in turn came upon a series of larger waterfalls plummeting downward alongside where I happened to be walking at the moment. However, the boardwalk ultimately brought all travelers to a glorious cataract residing at the upper end of the gorge (aptly known as *Avalanche Falls* in more recent years). It was always the most anticipated objective to any of my nocturnal quests to this place; and during all of my hundreds of trips into that particular gorge (both during daytime and at night), such an unsurpassable spot always felt like the grand finale to each and every venture there.

As I was nearing the inimitable presence of that magnanimous chute, an unusual amount of mist seemed to reflect and amplify the glowing lights radiating from the cataract itself and from the ever-rising water-bodies roiling beneath it. Simultaneously, quasi-vaporous drizzles and sprays further soaked my scant clothing and frigid skin with even more iciness, yet I didn't feel as being particularly cold at all.

And when I eventually came within several yards of that plunging liquified rumbling, as the walkway rose to an elevation equal to (and directly across from) the midway point of those mesmerizing cascades, a startling burst of light erupted from an intense, central speck within their wild, descending foam. Instantly, they compelled me to turn aside from my ascent up the rampway to face their glowing fluids face-to-face, and a more penetrating radiance soon spread outward as it illuminated the entirety of this vertical rush with an even more intensified brilliance. Such unrivaled vibrancies of light never revealed themselves to me until that precise moment.

Just then, from within these rays, a wise and seemingly sacred face began to materialize. As the kindly countenance fixed its unending gaze in my direction, an even more intense luminescence floated forward until it embraced my entire body. Not only did it absorb my physical form, but I could also feel it merge with my thoughts, my emotions, and even those profound and unknowable fibers dwelling within the heretofore unexplored regions of my soul.

While all of this transpired within and around me, benevolent words began to roll past my eardrums. Although the lips of that holy man didn't move in the slightest, I felt the miraculous messages were coming directly from him nonetheless. Yet, what I heard seemed to be emanating from everywhere else and out of everything else simultaneously.

His vocal utterances surged upward from the river waters below, rang out upon the waterfalls ahead of me, resounded within each tiny morsel of air and every droplet of spray, and even echoed through each crevice in those chasm walls—from behind their otherwise-impermeable densities where only muted miles of dirt, dust, and stone were presumed to exist.

Even so, perhaps the real reason why his generous words were infused upon the entirety of the place was because this saintly soul before me was a part of it all. Or more likely, he was one with it all. And everything was one with him. Thinking back to the words of Mother Teresa when she visited the inmates on death row—and how she proclaimed seeing the face of God in all of their faces—then I can only believe that the unifying visage with its powerful utterances was indeed the face of God as well, no matter how we wish to rationalize, justify, or deny such happenings to ourselves.

Although I can no longer remember the actual words spoken, I can confirm most assuredly that everything he pronounced was deeply affecting. Even to this day, I can still hear the timbre and cadence of his speech. He bestowed upon me a benediction that was equally inspired, inspiring, cathartic, and timely. His words seemed to be simultaneously retrospective, prophetic, personal, and ultimately universal in nature.

The immediate effect of his poetical phrases was like having calm waters wash away all the sorrows and anxieties that have ever existed. As he eventually spoke his last few words, an increased intensification of light touched every atom within the bounds of my mortal being; and during this final brightening of light, I began to feel warmth unlike anything I had experienced before or since that night in the gorge:

> *It was strong but not hot. It was intense but not burning. It wasn't painful but simply soothed. The only viable explanation for what I underwent might be none other than the warming touch of compassion itself.*

Once the vision faded from my sight and light fell back into its originally mild glow, I departed from the cataract and retraced my steps back to the car. The journey homeward was a silent saunter propelled by elation alone. Although thoroughly soaked in frigid spray (while continuing to pass puddles of standing water just beginning to ice over), my hands, my feet, and my entire body nevertheless remained the warmest they had ever felt.

It was from that moment until this very day, never again did my extremities turn purple from being cold. Nor has chronic cramping ever tormented my body anymore. Of course, when

extreme shifts in barometric pressure or some further serious health issues arose (like with anyone else who has had similar problems), I would still experience cold hands and feet. Though such occurrences were now very rare and never so severe or extreme—not even close.

Of course, I nevertheless might lapse into a bout of brief spasms if I had been putting enormous stress on my arms or legs while working arduously for hours. But those ongoing traumas I used to experience earlier in life simply vanished once my waterfall vision in the wilderness chose to bestow upon me a pervasive warmth remaining with me ever since that pivotal moment. Personally speaking, this was indeed a bona fide example of when so-called *hallucinations* actually can and do heal.

It goes without saying that the cathartic warmth I experienced in the gorge was nothing like the incapacitating heat of those high fevers I endured for decades. While fevers made me miserable, the purifying warmth that I experienced before such a saintly apparition felt instead akin to supreme joy. Of course, they had the potential of being just another pair of dualistic opposites unless I might find a way to overcome and transcend the illusory nature of their peculiar dualistic *seesaw* characteristics. In other words, the opposing ends of that seesaw had to be melded into compassion so those opposites no longer could exist.

Both of the two separate pieces of that *terror* and *joy* duality, to which Rabbi Kuschner referred as being the two essential components of any truly transcendental *wilderness* experience, I seemed to discover each of them at different times in my life and in vastly dissimilar situations. I can associate having had genuine terrors of the unknown while being confined to a sick bed for a sizable portion of my waking life—especially during childhood. Perhaps that horizontal prison of pain and sweat was how I entered the wilderness as a youngster. Whenever I was in this space of the unknown, I never knew what would happen next. I was isolated and occasionally felt lost. I often despaired, being totally filled with sorrow. Equally, I too was frequently lonely and very much afraid.

The decades of enduring nightmares, chronic cramping, and endless fevers were definitely a part of my own wilderness *terrors*. I had no access to the mountains in northern New England for the first two decades of my life, but I did face the interior wilderness terrors in my childhood bedroom through endless days and nights.

Yet, it was also upon that sickbed where I first spent countless hours in prayer and contemplation; and in forthcoming seasons—when I returned home from college during

vacations—my bed also became a meditation mat where I began a lifelong practice of *sitting*. So, if we realize and accept that Kuschner's *terrors and joys* can be discovered inside of ourselves, even while languishing in a sickbed.

Any form of *wilderness* (actual or otherwise) awaits us whenever and wherever we happen to be. Consequently, by the time l left to go to college, I definitely was a well-versed traveler to those inner *wilds* without ever leaving home as a teenager.

When facing my interior torments there, I often was confronted with a self-imposed specter of dying young; and even though the possibility of death frequently crossed my mind back then, it wasn't truly death that terrified me. It was the prospect of continuing to live in the manner to which I seemed to be forever bound.

A few years after I was married at somewhat of an early age at nineteen, my wife and I chose to make a dramatic change in our lives by moving from the New York suburbs to a remote log house in central New Hampshire where our other year-round *neighbors* (except for one elderly woman living a quarter-mile down the road) resided more than two miles away in any direction. We suddenly had landed ourselves in an ideal place for discovering and experiencing simultaneously the wilderness in its material form as well as through its more mystical manifestations in thought and soul.

Isolation was our constant companion. It was all around us. The remoteness of the place filled our senses and resounded within our minds, and it became a constant source of challenges and inspirations that affected us constantly—our own private terrors and joys of the wilderness—no matter what happened to be facing us in the rest of our lives at any given moment.

Moreover, this remote sanctuary invited us to partake in the wonders of solitude that increasingly strengthened and healed many aspects of who we were physically, emotionally, and spiritually. This was definitely true for the first several years we were there until various dualities of the wilderness terror and joy variety began to emerge, overtake, and corrode our convictions during the final couple of years we were there, especially as we neared the time when we were forced to move away. That house we happened to be renting was sold unexpectedly out from under us. The sale had been done in a devious way so we didn't become aware of our tenuous position until the very end; and back then, renters' rights were not as commonly known by the public as they are today—nor were they as substantial or well-enforced.

Although much of my life after that has been spent in places where wilderness areas were relatively nearby and easily accessible, there have definitely been times when necessity took me to more populated locales to live and work—despite how those more polluted areas would almost always become a serious detriment to my physical health. During those periods spent in busier communities, hiking up isolated mountains, writing or composing beneath roaring waterfalls, communing with wild creatures, and meditating amid panoramic vistas were no longer a part of my daily routine.

Consequently, I had to utilize other means through which I could connect with alternate forms of *wilderness*. As I just mentioned above, our interior *wilderness* is always accessible to us no matter where we happen to be at the time. Although personally speaking, I found it more challenging to access and maintain those alternate zones of solitude while being surrounded by the nearly inescapable busyness binding most human activities—the seductive lure of our addicting gadgets, entertainments, technologies, and countless other distractions.

Upon our ever-shrinking planet—in an increasingly overpopulated and adulterated environment where we all reside—most of us cannot find our way to commune in an actual wilderness environment, even occasionally. I have been most fortunate to do so, though there were many sacrifices having to be made in the process. But, considering that without choosing to withstand those sacrificial deficits affecting salary, career, and simply affording a roof overhead and food on the table, I don't think I could have sustained a reasonable semblance of good health otherwise—sacrifices or no.

Regardless of my own situation, it would nevertheless take untenable amounts of time and money to do so for a vast majority of the world's population. Aside from this, there would most likely be countless other unforeseen hardships to face as well. Therefore, when it is simply not an option to venture into an actual wilderness region (especially as they have been shrinking substantially day by day for decades), it is especially important to find ways to create a suitable atmosphere where we can entice the wilderness to come to us.

I recall hearing experts in various psychological and spiritual fields proclaim that those who feel it necessary to go off into isolation in order to become more attuned to their truer nature were doing so only to escape their responsibilities in what those professionals deemed to be our so-called *real world*. They further added that everyone can pray and meditate anywhere, and at any given moment.

This notion of practicing a spiritual discipline wherever we happen to be is definitely a

valid one. But I don't necessarily concur with the statement that having a desire to find the most suitable place for our spiritual practices is necessarily an attempt to shirk our responsibility of living. Indeed, we definitely can manage to practice prayer or meditating almost anywhere; but is this the most effective approach to utilize our practice time optimally?

No doubt we could balance ourselves on top of one of those gigantic interstate billboards hanging over the Long Island Expressway while quietly uttering our prayers. Undeniably, we could conceivably park ourselves on cold, filthy pavement in a rat-infested alleyway, at an underground platform where it might be possible to sit down ten feet from subways roaring by, or on a busy sidewalk where throngs of passersby push and lunge over and around us to get to Times Square, Wall Street, or any other hectic destination. In all of these situations it would be conceivable to close our eyes and fall into a state of deep meditation. But can we ever imagine why we might actually want to do so?

Unquestionably, I had amazing, uplifting, and even transformational experiences as a teenager when I used to pray for the countless people surrounding me while sitting within various, congested subway cars. As was mentioned more than once in earlier sections, there was that very tall African stranger who came up to me, unexpectedly called me by name, and thanked me while simply gazing gently into my eyes, nodding knowingly, and audibly mouthing my name with a silent *thank you* before quickly departing from the car, never to cross my path again. There were also times when I meditated on busy city sidewalk benches or even in mall cafeterias—aside from the many other places not necessarily ideal for the practice of any spiritual discipline.

Occasionally, I did find it useful to practice under those types of conditions, even though they almost never drew me into a *space* I might consider baring even the slightest resemblance to any *wilderness* at the time. Nonetheless, they were very instructive on how to let go of the undesirable distractions surrounding me, thereby making future journeys into any internal (or external) wilderness more attainable and effective.

It is essential to experiment with how we can let go of all the ongoing diversions that yoke us to our physical surroundings exclusively, sidetracking our willingness to delve into the interior self and discover the wild frontiers therein. However, in the many decades of experimenting with various forms of spiritual regimens and diverse locations where to focus my spiritual regimen most effectively, I found the key to trigger miraculous transformations, be receptive to unseen guidance and protection, manifest healing, and activate many other

tangible and intangible blessings was to practice praying, meditating, and reciting affirmations in locations where I could most readily be inspired and virtually *magnetized* emotionally. This meant being somewhere that actually facilitated my reaching inwardly to create and maintain a sanctuary devoid of interference from the outside world.

As anyone might surmise by reading through the preceding pages, some of the most transformative moments during the past several decades occurred most frequently in beautiful, remote settings that filled me simultaneously with awe and peace. But for day-to-day practice, when those special surroundings were not available, I also found it necessary to find a single place at home either inside or out-of-doors—where I could more readily approach similar states of radiance and joy.

Of course, many among us might feel that there are no such places like this existing in their lives. Certainly, there were many periods in my own life where this was definitely the case. Yet, it should be our primary purpose to create an environment where we can feel as close as possible to being inspired and at peace. Here are some of the things I had to consider while deciding where this prayer and meditation space (or spaces) ought to be:

1. What is the quietest place at home where I can be without interruptions or intrusions?

2. Are there any alternative spots (inside or out) in case my usual place is needed or occupied by someone else?

3. What times of day tend to be the quietest and when will I be the least likely to be disturbed?

4. If I live in an unavoidably noisy environment, what can I do to minimize the noise disturbance?

5. If there are no places at home to create a suitably tranquil setting, then where could I go on a daily basis to find the most appropriate place possible?

In a majority of the houses or apartments where I didn't simply live by myself, my bedroom normally became the logical place to set up the necessary space. If noise were a constant factor, then I would get a comfortable pair of headphones or ear buds to listen to some sort of fitting music. I always set the volume at a level that would insulate me from the ambient noise but not distract me or pull my focus into the music rather than keeping it as inspiring background for the obvious matter at hand.

When selecting what I should listen to, I found music that stirred me deeply tended to

be the most effective. But it was important for it to be relatively tranquil, soothing, and uncomplicated for the most part. Using inspiring pieces that filled me with a sort of *soothing electricity*—generating possible chills to occur or even inciting goosebumps to appear on the skin. Regardless of the outward responses triggered, my body and mind nevertheless should be receptive to miraculous transformations and unexpected metaphysical occurrences as well.

In recent years, I found it very useful to create playlists of some of my favorite, *uncomplicated* choral music. This obviously wasn't possible when I was younger, long before the inception of the Internet. Though I normally preferred unaccompanied voices as my backdrop for meditating, some selections did include orchestra or piano as well, just so long as they were not the type of music that lured me into giving it my undivided attention.[40]

Other than music, I found nature sounds to be effective backdrops for my spiritual practice on occasion. Online, there are now vast compendiums of videos filled exclusively with recorded sounds such as waterfalls, thunderstorms, rain showers, gusty winds, gentle breezes, waves along the seashore, birdsong, and night sounds in the forest. Some of them go on for many hours in just a single playthrough. I found these types of videos to be helpful alternatives for when I wanted to be in secluded areas but couldn't find a way to get there.

During the few times when I did live in busy downtown areas, I frequently visited empty churches, synagogues, temples, and cathedrals where a certain amount of solitude might often be found. When there were no such spiritual sanctuaries available, I would bring my music player to quiet corners in public or college libraries. Even a park bench away from the bustle of street activity would suffice. But when there were simply no other places that I could find to meditate and pray, simply sitting in my car became my own private gateway into the wilderness.

Of course, when we first have the desire to open ourselves to the vast *wilderness* within—but are new and inexperienced when it comes to employing a daily routine for doing so—it is definitely recommended to find somewhere with the least amount of commotion possible; because when we are beginners at doing anything, this is the time when we are most likely to be distracted, even to the extent of giving up our desired pursuit altogether. Although I attempted to describe here some of the things that helped me to navigate my own spiritual practice (even in situations that were not always conducive to such endeavors) all of us still

[40] For those who might find it helpful, some of the choral groups that I found most suitable in creating an optimal background for my spiritual practice included selected performances by Voces8, the Cambridge Singers, the Tallis Scholars, Chanticleer, the Tenebrae Choir, King's College Choir of Cambridge, the King's Singers, Phoenix Chorale, Kansas City Chorale, and numerous others who specialized in performing the same or similar types of music.

must find our personally unique solutions, because everyone of us has a set of circumstances unlike anyone else's to navigate through successfully.

But once we have established a successful spiritual routine in the most appropriate location possible and at any given time, a couple of questions that frequently arise from out of the mouths of inexperienced practitioners are something like these:

What happens next?

What am I supposed to do now?

Along with such posers, people have often expressed to me their deep desire to experience visions and wish to have miracles unfold before them as they have happened to me. They wish to be touched by the appearance of saints and mages. They truly hope that some blessed visitation from God will come into their lives and heal their afflictions and save them from the hardships and drudgeries of their existence.

Not to be confused with the older psychiatrist friend (I previously mentioned) who studied piano with me for years, I also had a younger psychiatrist friend who worked as an emergency room doc at a local hospital decades ago. We occasionally discussed over dinner the nature of visions, miracles, healings, and similar topics. He was fascinated and genuinely moved when I spoke to him about my own experiences. In fact, he admitted that he has always wanted to have such things happen to him in his own life and wondered why they always seemed to elude him.

He went on further by saying:

> You know, working in psychiatry for some time now, I have been privy to hearing hundreds of anecdotes from patients along these lines. But, of all the countless stories told to me, yours are the only ones that don't sound like they've been concocted by some crazy person. In fact, I regard you as being one of the least-crazy people I've ever met.

After thanking him for his vote of confidence concerning my *mental health*, I then replied:

> I believe the reason that someone in your profession hears about these types of stories coming mostly from people with mental health issues is because you have more contact with them than with any other type of individual. And those who know you socially wouldn't dare to express such things in front of a *shrink*, because they wouldn't want you

to diagnose them as being nuts!

Many rational people do bear witness to bizarre and inexplicable happenings occasionally but tend not to reveal them to anyone for fear of having their sanity questioned, especially with a mental-health professional. So I guess that definitely leaves you out of the loop!

At this remark, we both burst into several moments of uncontained laughter. Then, once our sudden surge of mirth subsided, I resumed conversing with him by adding:

While people suffer from emotional or mental difficulties, their aptitude for perceiving all things metaphysical tend to be distorted, disturbing, and/or damaging. Yet, this is no more (or less) the case whenever and whatever they perceive while seeing, hearing, feeling, touching, and smelling with their so-called *five physical senses* as well.

Obviously, patients come to you who are most likely out of balance in at least some aspect of their lives. Therefore, it is not such a jump to deduce that their perceptions—whether being deemed as physical, metaphysical, or simply as imagined—will also be out of balance.

However, people like myself, who are constantly working on harmonizing their abilities to discern through regular spiritual practice, will be more capable of identifying, distinguishing, interpreting, and possibly be the actual cause of manifesting ethereal phenomena. And they do it in a way that is intended to be increasingly balanced, balancing, and cathartic—even to the point of seeming as something miraculous to others around them.

Consequently, such occurrences are more likely to be aligned with the wondrous and the wonderful rather than (in the instances experienced by your patients) being frustrated, confused, disruptive, and frightening to such a degree as often being debilitating as well. Perhaps, this is why you feel that my experiences appear *normal* and *sane* in contrast to those disclosed by patients who you've treated for a variety of disorders.

After we spoke at length about these issues with both levity and profound seriousness, we then posed other questions and speculated answers to important pieces of this complex puzzle beginning with inquiries into the following:

1.Why do people with mental health issues appear more susceptible to having supposed hallucination-like experiences?

2. Are said episodes simply part of an illness or is there more to them than being solely a disorder?

3. And when so-called mentally healthy people face these types of occurrences, does it mean they also have mental illness that has just gone undiagnosed?

First of all, I believe that many of us look at these issues backwards. It is not that inexplicable experiences have to be either the cause or even a resultant portion of any mental issue or illness necessarily, but those who have imbalances interpret and react to their seemingly incomprehensible experiences and/or perceptions in an imbalanced way—due to their ongoing fears and instabilities.

After all, those who have psychological issues can and do perceive many other more *concrete* things in a hazy manner aside from having elusive *visions*, hearing *voices*, or a multitude of other superficially seeming implausibilities and ostensibly *mysterious* mental manifestations. And as I have said repeatedly, such happenings are too often lumped together conveniently in the over-stuffed category of *hallucinations*.

Some of these more visibly detectable distortions can include the ongoing misinterpretations or distortions of conversations, the chronic misreading of other people's facial expressions, and bodily gestures often resulting in inappropriate, paranoid, and oftentimes muddled reactions, inaccuracies, and omissions. This frequently happens when it comes to remembering things and constantly confusing and misconceiving a wide variety of circumstances (we all otherwise deem to be a definite part of tangible reality).

Indeed, every aspect of our physical, mental, and emotional environment can be twisted out of shape when imbalances are occurring. So, of course the more elusive and etheric aspects of what people observe, distinguish, perceive, or experience on any level will most likely be misshapen and misconstrued as well.

Now, let us get back to the earlier question of what individuals should do after they have found a suitable place to meditate, pray, and/or recite affirmations every day. The next step should be to sit comfortably and begin to relax. There are countless approaches to each of these endeavors that I have employed in the past and it might be helpful to check out various websites dedicated to these subjects if my suggestions offered earlier do not satisfy anyone's specific

needs.

The main thing to remember is that whenever we meditate, pray, or affirm, it is important not to set up a myriad of expectations (including to strive for miracles and visions, or even for more mundane things such as romantic love, money, and success). Nevertheless, those mundane things can and should also be addressed—but as secondary concerns. Ultimately, what is most important is to fill our hearts and minds with compassion and imagine spreading it outward into our lives, our families, our friends, our coworkers, to the rest of humanity, and even into every fiber of existence.

As our practice of these endeavors become so consistent and persistent that we actually begin to manifest a strong belief in the things we are ardently rehearsing, it is then equally essential to go out into the world and take constant and appropriate actions to carry out and share the benevolence, compassion, and mercy discovered in our daily spiritual routine and utilize them in whatever we happen to be doing—and, wherever we happen to be doing it.

For some of us, to begin this sort of approach may be our first journey into the wilderness. Yet, we mustn't force ourselves upon the wilds of our hearts and minds with predetermined expectations and timelines about what we hope to accomplish while we are there. Because whenever we start carving up the unknowable into separate bits of preconceived notions, then we have walked right past even the haziest facsimile of *true wilderness* and have failed to enter into any such place altogether.

In order to discover this abode within ourselves, we must first cohabitate with it and allow for it to infiltrate our bodies, hearts, and minds without an agenda or any expectation of return. Sometimes there might be extraordinary things that happen to us immediately. But, it can also take weeks, months, years, and even decades of practice before certain types of results can truly become apparent. Regardless, we will still eventually come to understand what extraordinary things have come to pass in our own interior wilds and how they could have already begun to transform our way of living.

In each of the numerous situations I have described throughout the pages in this book, many of them might be considered as being hallucinations by some. Yet, as I have emphasized before, actual hallucinations never heal. They don't save lives and don't alter the conditions and directions of our state of being in any transcendent manner whatsoever. But discovering new perceptions founded upon compassion and divine love definitely can and do so readily.

From a mind gardener's perspective, people who have disturbing visions, intrusive voices

emanating ostensibly from out of *nowhere*, or other unsettling sensations and manifestations are undergoing just another part of duality's weediness that often confuses and steers them away from the crux of any pertinent issue rather than leading us towards it. This is what the majority of people have been taught to believe about any mystifying awareness or bizarre experience, that they are definitely hallucinatory in nature and most likely caused by mental aberrations. Unfortunately, such a mindset has prevented us from exploring, ultimately practicing, and subsequently strengthening essential perceptions for us to live in a more balanced, discerning, and compassionate manner.

In order to appreciate this point, we should consider the following: if we lived underground in a totally darkened environment and were suddenly brought out into a sunny day, would that signify everything we experienced out in broad daylight was hallucinatory? Our eyes not being exercised in the conventional manner for extended periods of time most likely wouldn't register things correctly or accurately because of lacking the kind of practice we normally engage in (but take for granted) in a light-filled environment. However, within that perennial, subterranean blackness other forms of *sight* nevertheless will most likely evolve.

The same might be said if any of our other physical senses existed in an environment of total deprivation and then were suddenly and dramatically thrust into a situation where they were flooded with input that would compel them to function in a manner that they were never accustomed to doing so previously. Therefore, in diametrically opposed physical settings where such results of our sensory perceptions could actually be considered a *normal* way of functioning, then which would actually be seen as the hallucination, which would be the result of mental imbalance, and which might actually evolve into an eventual state of perceived normality?

Perhaps in those cases, where the environment is unlike what we are usually accustomed to, the senses behave in a totally unexpected and unique way because we no longer practice using our sensory organs in the manner that we currently have come to acknowledge as being *normal*. Any underdeveloped perception suddenly forced to function either for the first time or only initiated occasionally, randomly, and without any methodical practice or utilization beforehand must simply be employed consistently in order to establish a reliable alternative when it comes to functioning effectively.

So as to conclude the story about my conversations with that emergency room doctor, there was one important matter that I always failed to discuss with him during any of our chats

back then. The only reason for this question being excluded was—basically—because it hadn't yet become totally apparent to me either.

Instead, it took countless more years for me to grasp how there is always now, always has been, and always will be a fine line between any of the inexplicable and *mystical* occurrences I have experienced (or those experienced by anyone else) as simply something hallucinated or instead being genuine encounters escorting us beyond the predefined, dualistic, limited, and limiting expectations of what we hitherto thought *reality* actually is.

Yet, once I personally began exercising a daily routine focused upon an understanding of the all-encompassing nature of divine love—manifesting in every aspect of our existence at all times, in all places, and within all living things—it eventually dawned on me that when we practice unconsciously every facet of life within the inconsistent, unpredictable, and confusing shifts, resistances, and endless permutations of duality's paradoxical confinements and freedoms, its seemingly unending limitlessness and its paradoxical limitations, everything we experience is actually some kind of hallucinatory manifestation caused by the inconsistencies and instabilities of such things where they haven't transformed entirely into genuine aspects of divine love. Such dilemmas enable the inception and perpetuation of all our inner and outer struggles.

Of course, these include the ongoing battles between our fluctuating hopes and fears, kindheartedness and jealousies, generosities and selfishness, honesty and deceit, subjugation and domination… And as with all dualistic pairings existing in this veil of illusions, the recounting of them can be perpetuated ad infinitum.

But when we have thoroughly practiced opening up to activating our intangible sensory apparatuses (senses solely designed to perceive the constant, potent presence of divine love, existing at all times within and around us), we will be able to display inestimable examples of miraculous wonder, blessedness, and grace. Consequently, anyone who has discovered how to shed all of their dualistic perceptions of bodily *eyesight* and *seeing*, and replace them with latent and formerly hidden senses (exclusively designed for transcendental seeing, hearing, feeling, and ultimately loving), then there will be an actual transcendence where the veil of Maya will dissolve and anyone who attains this heightened state of existence will actually perceive the true nature of the Mind Garden. This is the haven where everything within its limitless bounds exists well-tended, without any traces of the weeds of duality intruding at all.

V.

A flight of love to the rescue...

Sometime in the early 2020s (during the Covid pandemic) I remained isolated at home like so many other people at the time. It happened to be the day before Thanksgiving and I went out onto the cabin deck just as first traces of light began to seep through the receding darkness of that early autumn morn. Even while a lingering dimness still hovered faintly over the frosted remnants of my small vegetable garden, I soon began to hear faint footsteps crunching through fallen limbs and leaves only a short distance away. It was a surprise to me, because during the nearly decade and a half that I engaged in this daily, post-dawn ritual, it was the first human activity I ever noticed in those dense woods.

As I stood in silence for several minutes, it became apparent that someone was gradually approaching upon the overgrown traces of the old logging road nearby—one which probably hasn't been used in years. Although the path never pointed directly at the cabin, it did run a brief parallel course (keeping a short distance away for about a hundred and fifty feet of its track) before veering back into the deeper forest once again.

As the figure of a local hunter with rifle in hand came into view, I waved amicably at him in silent animation while watching his head turn in my direction. Despite looking directly at me for more than a minute, he never responded with even the slightest gesture of acknowledgment and merely continued to stand there instead with a scowl on his face.

Eventually, his unpleasant gaze turned back towards the path in front of him; and then he proceeded forward, slowly fading from my sight. During his departure, I remained standing on the porch and continued looking out into the woods while the image of him eventually evaporated completely. Even within those broadening distances between us, his ghostlike silhouette persisted for a few more minutes past that sunless November sunrise; and the ever-diminishing echoes from his heavy footfalls eventually dissolved as well.

So this unexpected and somewhat ill-disposed appearance of him simply slipped away softly into mist; and although I persisted in scanning the forest for more than a half-hour thereafter, I didn't see or hear anything else. Not even the tiniest woodland creatures scampered about nor the most reticent songs from newly awakened birds commenced. The

forest remained uncharacteristically still—even for this quiet time of day.

Though the incident was rather brief, it turned out to be quite unsettling for me. In fact, as the man came fairly close at hand and was looking in my direction for more than just a mere glance, I could feel his icy stare persist in penetrating the entire space between us. He certainly didn't give any impression of being sociable in the least; and aside from that, he was also porting a weapon. Normally, meeting hunters in such an isolated area never before made me feel so uncomfortable or vulnerable. It became especially concerning because he came only yards away from the cabin. This made it perfectly clear that he now knew where I lived.

Despite this, the next day was Thanksgiving and fortunately remained serene and uneventful throughout its entirety. But when the following morning came around and I ventured out onto the deck as usual, I noticed some rustling sounds in the thick underbrush just beyond the garden fence.

As I turned further in the direction of those noises, there was that same hunter peering out of the scrub, glaring more menacingly than before, and he held his rifle at chest level with both hands tightly wrapped around it. Why he decided to come so close to the house seemed not only needless, but equally worrisome as well.

I felt as though this intrusion wasn't just about him innocently exploring the area. Consequently, it disturbed me much more than his passing presence did a couple of days before. Now, the current situation seemed increasingly like an immediate threat to my person. After all, he was no longer on any path or in any nearby clearing. Instead, he was wallowing through some rather dense underbrush—all the while, steadily approaching the cabin itself.

At this point, he was only about fifty feet away from me; and just as I had a strong impulse to call out to him and ask what he was doing in those bushes, I unexpectedly noticed out of the corner of my eye something else creating a distant motion off to the extreme left. It suddenly sprang from out of a roughly cleared patch of land about a hundred-eighty feet away.

Then, as I turned my head to face the source of that movement, I immediately spotted an exceptionally large bird flying in my direction. At first, I took it to be one of the friendly ravens who lived locally and who often came to circle me from overhead—either while I was simply gardening, or on the rare occasion when I suddenly yelled out either from suddenly having hit my head or from some other painful mishap.

During such moments, my raven buddies would almost always venture unusually close while squawking straight at me with seeming concern. Yet, after I might call back at them

(expressing that everything was okay), they typically cried to me one final time before flying elsewhere.

But in this particular case—just after Thanksgiving—I quickly realized that the bird in question was approaching far too fast and was much too large to be a raven or any other of the more sizeable avian residents of the *neighborhood*. Indeed, it almost immediately became apparent that this particular fellow was none other than the largest golden eagle I have ever encountered.

He was continuing to rocket straight towards the deck at breakneck speed, so there was a moment when I truly wondered if this hasty intruder was essentially going to crash into me. And then an alternative consideration flashed ominously through my mind as well. Could he instead be planning to assault me head-on?

But at the last possible moment, this majestic creature deviated from his presumed course and instead dove unexpectedly down beneath the deck's surface—as if he were going to land upon the withering, late-November grasses below. Yet (in another instant), he swiftly swooped upward again to maintain a completely vertical position precisely in front of me. He rose up to meet me, essentially face-to-face.

In order for him to maintain this unique position, he continued to beat his massive wings almost in a casual manner—or what might even be considered as being *graceful*. While he continued to levitate close to my face, I noticed how immense his wingspan had to be. It certainly was considerably greater than my own bodily height of six feet. In fact, his immense width had to be between seven-and-a-half and eight feet from one wingtip to the other. He could have ostensibly wrapped me up inside of those giant *flappers* at least three times over.

All at once, this unexpectedly *intimate* proximity between us was initially intimidating because (now) his beak happened to be so close that if he jutted slightly forward with his neck, he could have pecked off my nose with a single thrust. Though despite the seeming danger, those fiercely majestic eyes of his simply peered into mine and instantly calmed me instead.

For it seemed as though his eyes weren't only gazing into the very heart of me, but it simultaneously felt like there existed unrelenting waves of divine intention emanating from his ironically ferocious gaze flooding my soul. And they only filled me with immense kindness, grace, and a total sense of benevolence and protection.

Any feelings of anxiety were completely washed away and all that remained was an almost palpable wonder. After several surreal moments of experiencing this newfound state of

wellbeing, the apprehensions I first experienced had totally vanished. In their place remained an unimaginable quietude, one which enfolded me in a winged shroud of mesmerizing joy, peace, and utter surety.

As I continued to be held in the trance of those penetrating and paradoxically savage eyes, rather than feeling any ferocity from this creature's seeming ability to envelope me within its wildness, I instead felt liberated by the total sense of a cryptic rapture accompanying it. Paradoxically, it also seemed as though I were forever protected by a powerfully magnetic force pervading his entire being. Consequently, I came to surmise that what I was experiencing emanated from far beyond the mere bodily presence of this remarkable bird.

But, in the midst of an unfoldment of such extraordinary wonders, a burst from the mundane suddenly intruded upon us with a rustling from those nearby bushes once again. This not only broke the current hypnotic spell held over me, but it also appeared to affect the eagle in the same manner.

As soon as I turned my head toward those bushy scrubs once more, the hunter burst out of his thorny hiding place with a mixed expression of disbelief and more than a trace of genuine panic coloring his face. Once I began to regard this man emerging from out of the thickets, likewise did the eagle do the same.

In fact, that eagle disengaged from his treading *water* (or more precisely, the air) with his wings and departed from his position in front me to resituate himself upon the branches of a sturdy sapling only fifteen feet from that gaping hunter. The eagle placed himself directly between the man and myself, as if he were attempting to shield me from any danger that the hunter might be intending to unleash.

Without hesitation, my fierce and fiery protector started thrashing his massive wings at the fellow remaining nervously in the bushes. At that point, there were only a few feet left between them.

But now, the eagle was no longer flapping those wings gracefully as he had been doing while he stayed in front of me. Instead, the eagle's constant movements produced by his feathery arms had now accelerated to the point of appearing quite violent indeed.

Wide-eyed, the hunter stood there frozen still. It appeared as though actual dread may have overtaken him in that moment. As the avian colossus continued with his aggressive stance—hovering close by for some time longer—I suddenly felt compelled to break away from this mesmerizing faceoff and retreat indoors to search for my camera.

All things considered, I admittedly thought that now might be the last chance for me to memorialize the final segment of such an exceptional encounter. However, by the time I got back to the deck with smart-phone in hand, both hunter and eagle had already departed from the scene; and neither one of them has ever returned.

But, it would also be correct to say that the great eagle never actually left me in perhaps the most important way imaginable. His masterfully feathered form, his monumental wings, his lethal yet righteous beak, and his profoundly penetrating eyes have been present within my mind's eye every day since then. For many months thereafter, I could see his potent watchfulness upon me every time my own outward observations happened to look *inward*. To this day, whenever it might dawn on me to think of him, that magnetic gaze of his would appear to me, pierce my heart, penetrate my mind, and even transform whatever I happened to be experiencing at the moment with a sudden and unexpected shift into grace.

There have been countless occasions since my encounter with the eagle when I questioned what that ostensibly *chance* meeting truly meant. Was it merely happenstance? Or could his fleeting, unforeseen appearance into my life have been a conscious intervention of sorts? And if so, was he essentially guarding me against real and imminent dangers from that hunter? And perhaps, it was part of something even greater—something akin to genuine love.

After all, what does this divine love truly look and feel like? How does it touch us, interact with us, and how does it ultimately behave? I believe that there were countless situations when I felt that love became actively and consciously present in my life. Many of those instances were depicted in this book.

When the eagle seemed to penetrate me with his eyes, I instantly felt at peace. But I also experienced a sense of timelessness filled with indescribable joy. Likewise, I perceived—hidden beneath the frail layers of my own illusion-filled mortality—an eternal wellbeing that embodies everyone's truly cathartic transformation into that which is ever greater, something equally wondrous and miraculous.

I experienced this love in my many encounters with *saintly* and *angelic* figures over the years. I felt it at my uncle's home on the Connecticut shore while viewing my body being present in four separate locations simultaneously. And I most assuredly felt it when my affliction with excruciatingly painful, purple hands were healed permanently before the wondrous waterfall in that New Hampshire gorge. I also perceived it while watching the northern lights appear above the rarified mountain plateau on countless occasions, in my blissful interactions with two

swimmers (both father and son from the French Alps) who were celebrating their birthdays while I was also celebrating mine on the same day, and not the least when that great red wolf howled untranslatable benedictions into my heart—those which ushered into existence a totally new phase of my life.

Each of these preceding examples, the many others also described earlier in the book, and the hundreds of instances I was resigned to leave untold have all been among the veritable outcroppings of inspiration and healing—those which have soothed and inspired me deeply year after year. All of them have also proven to be some of the most liberating and equally instructional *blooms of thought* blossoming into visible manifestations of love throughout my innumerable, transient hours here on earth.

That being said, when and if others choose to dedicate their lives to the task of consciously gardening the mind, we all can essentially utilize the important skill of consciously tending our thoughts. By diligently *weeding* through even the most tedious and dark times of our lives, we can and will come across those exquisite buds hitherto hidden within those formerly personalized quagmires of duality.

Moreover, when we are compelled to persevere through each of the darker vicissitudes (portrayed as being a part of the ultimate wonders that have touched me again repeatedly), they have all been pieces of the actual process of unfoldment and their accompanying metaphors on my lifelong journey into love—always brimming with compassionate and merciful outpourings of the divine.

- Chapter 9 -

Waking the Eden Within

I.

"Faith, hope, and love abide; and the greatest of these is love..."[1]

This brief phrase from I Corinthians emphasizes the importance of three attributes found at the heart of Christian faith—even when they aren't labeled, recognized, or practiced as such. Furthermore, if we just consider hope and faith (the alleged lesser of these three) within the mind garden metaphor as well, then it can become a straightforward task to visualize them simply as offshoots of the accompanying, greater attribute and primal seed of the garden: divine love.

Obviously, hope and faith are only two examples of a long list of *divine attributes* that also can be cultivated from the underlying roots of veritable love. Among those that were mentioned earlier, there is transcendental joy (a joy existing beyond the duality of joy and sorrow). There are also divine comfort, healing, forgiveness, prosperity, protection, humility, and wisdom. Of course, these other conceivable offshoots also emanate out of love.

When we think about hope (as with any ostensible virtue), we often perceive it as facing or opposing an alleged opposite. In the case of hope, this opposite could be either hopelessness, despair, false hope, or even foolish hope. From a cynical perspective, there are those who have been known to label hope simply as a *narcotic*, a possible nemesis for all pragmatic experience. They choose to think of it as an opiate-induced reverie that numbs our senses from experiencing the relentless and brutal realities of existence.

Yet, veritable hope—or transcendental hope—is an offshoot of the divine presence of love. It isn't a denial of the current state of things. It isn't a hope that struggles dualistically for supremacy against anguish, futility, and the seemingly insurmountable. Neither is it an oblivious

[1] Above is a clipped version of the passage below from I Corinthians 13:13 in the New Testament:

> And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

condition of naïvely whitewashing over all injustices, cruelties, sufferings, and tragedies in the world without any corrective objective or purpose.

The same can be said of faith. Obviously, faith can be considered to be a delusion unto itself. Deep faith oftentimes is equated with blind faith or mindless faith.

Yet, both hope and faith—as divine attributes—simply consist of emotionalized, lovingly practiced, and mindful thoughts, ideas, intentions, and (ultimately) actions that can grow further into balanced beliefs. In turn, those unwavering beliefs often manifest miraculous, formerly-unimaginable changes all around us. Hope and faith are repetitive *processes* of planting seeds of new possibilities into soil that oftentimes no longer functions as part of an actual garden. Rather, such unkempt earth might come to subsist solely beneath a chaotic quagmire that contains life-sapping weeds such as regret, fear, and indifference.

Hope and faith can be seen as two of the preliminary restorers of ourselves, and of all that is. Genuine divine hope and authentic divine faith are unquestionable attributes for all who would tend the mind garden consciously.

In her poem *The Gates of Hope*, Victoria Safford[2] reveals a legitimate portal to the garden of our hearts and minds where every aspiration, expectation, promise, possibility, and potential can be discovered. She bids us to join her there and to persist unwavering as the sentinels of those gates. Moreover, while acting as faithful gatekeepers, our duty is to invite all others to pass through that sacred entryway where all of our own burgeoning groves await each of us; and every loving dream of possibility is nurtured while transforming into an ultimate realization fulfilled:

> Our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of Hope—
> Not the prudent gates of Optimism,
> Which are somewhat narrower.
> Not the stalwart, boring gates of Common Sense;
> Nor the strident gates of Self-Righteousness,
> Which creak on shrill and angry hinges
> (People cannot hear us there; they cannot pass through)
> Nor the cheerful, flimsy garden gate of

[2] Rev. Safford is the lead minister at the White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church in Mahtomedi, Minnesota. She also is a poet and author.

"Everything is gonna' be all right."
But a different, sometimes lonely place,
The place of truth-telling,
About your own soul first of all and its condition.
The place of resistance and defiance,
The piece of ground from which you see the world
Both as it is and as it could be
As it will be;
The place from which you glimpse not only struggle,
But the joy of the struggle.
And we stand there, beckoning and calling,
Telling people what we are seeing
Asking people what they see.

Ironically, these *gates of hope* (along with the gates of *faith*) can actually entice us into more weeds of duality—back into places which continue to validate and strengthen opposing forces—as is true with anything else in existence. Nevertheless, they are also the perfect place to transcend such dualities in life by integrating all of our hopes with true faith. And while contemplating this joining, it would be fitting here to reflect further upon the actual nature of that faith with which hope must join—as is described in this brief, poetic musing of Rabindranath Tagore: [3]

Faith is the bird that feels the light when dawn is still dark.

However, in order for our blending of hope with faith to be veritably divine (devoid of duality), we must continue to amalgamate these potential divine attributes with divine love. For without this eternal love, they can never be—by themselves—truly divine. Instead, they will instantaneously transmute into the insidious weeds of dichotomous illusions once again.

[3] Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) was an Indian writer, poet, playwright, painter, philosopher, composer, and social reformer. He lived and worked actively during the Bengali Renaissance, won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913, and was the first non-European to win that honor.

II.

The essential attribute of patience...

For most of my life, I always seemed to be able to console myself in any difficult situation with the belief that I could surmount any harrowing circumstance; and one of the basic reasons for this—as I thought it to be—was my capacity for patience in almost every situation. I appeared to demonstrate this seeming virtue amid many adversities. Even when I was very young, I oftentimes was capable of withstanding deception and betrayal, verbal and physical abuse, extreme rudeness, and all sorts of condemnation.

Throughout the decades, whenever things failed to turn out well, I eventually could pick myself up and start over again, quietly, steadily, without bravado. Because of decades consumed by long-lasting bouts of physical illness, depression, acute pain, and sleeplessness, the well-centered part of me (when allowed to rise to the foreground) consistently acted as a guide teaching the rest of my being how to reset my compass from the calming forbearance and fortitude residing within. In recent years, a financially destitute existence compounded by a return of earlier health conditions has further required of me unending stamina and serenity, indubitably surrounded by a framework of patience.

However, about fifteen years ago, I initially came across an old saying that many of my friends and students already knew:

> The reward of patience is patience.[4]

When I read this adage for the first time, an unexpected reaction took place within me. There was a sudden and immense exasperation that welled up inside and it suddenly burst forth when I yelled out reflexively a rather unexpected expletive. It was as though an instantaneous anger ignited and exploded, because of all those years through which I endured patiently now would only seem to be repaid with more of the same.

Yet, almost in the same breath, my body broke into uproarious laughter when I

[4] Although the author of this phrase is considered to be anonymous, it nonetheless is frequently attributed to Augustine of Hippo (354–430).

simultaneously realized that such a reaction contained no patience at all! It was then when I first began to question and reassess how I practiced patience and what intentions actually were seeded deep within me were only a potential virtue and not the actual virtue—which I thought had been mastered long before then.

But the practice of patience is simply another tool for maintaining the garden. Patience never has a specific goal, never has a specific endgame, and never has a specific destination—other than to persevere through everything else unendingly. However, if we ever choose to relinquish patience (even after finally achieving everyone of our preset aspirations due to our persistent practice of patience), then those dearly acquired aspirations can easily fall back into duality, where patience-versus-impatience, patience-versus-intolerance, patience-versus-frustration and countless other dualities will continue to undermine the garden.

III.

"There is a place in the soul that neither time nor space, nor created thing can touch..."[5]

These words attributed to Johannes Eckhart[6] most likely refer to what I have described earlier as the *divine within*. This infinitely vast and unending domain resides paradoxically within each of our limited, spatially defined bodies—even as those impermanent and fragile frames wither, decay, and crumble into dust. All the while, this perpetually enduring estate remains free from the illusory shackles of time and space and therefore exists not only as what is considered to be *within* us all, but it also is the true nature of everything we perceive as being external, physical, and all else beyond what we normally accept as the entirety of material

[5] In a 2008 *On Being* radio broadcast entitled *The Inner Landscape of Beauty*, the Irish poet, priest, and philosopher John O'Donohue quoted this line from the works of the thirteenth-century Dominican monk Meister Eckhart.

[6] The name given to Meister Eckhart at birth.

reality.

Furthermore, such an impervious yet subtle *somewhere* about which Meister Eckhart spoke so simply and profoundly is equally unaffected by the further deceptions continually generated by those dualistic distances of which both time and space are made. It is perhaps our everlasting refuge of conscious knowing that remains present, animate, and aware—regardless of whether we consider ourselves to be alive as corporeal forms or already pronounced as having been delivered beyond the doorway of death.

The poet Rumi may have been describing the same *place* as an elusively wondrous and rich domain found outside the dualities of right and wrong when he wrote:

> Out beyond ideas of right doing and wrong doing
> There is a field.
> I will meet you there.
>
> When the soul lies down in that grass
> The world is too full to talk about it.

And the English cleric John Donne offered a beautiful prayer as both a supplication and poetic affirmation to guide us into an ultimate refuge devoid of duality. Here is a portion of it:[7]

> Bring us… into the house and gate of heaven:
> To enter into that gate and dwell in that house,
> Where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light;
> No noise nor silence, but one equal music;
> No fears nor hopes, but one equal possession;
> No ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity…

While in contrast—through recent centuries past—a majority of Western scientists have held an unyielding opinion claiming emphatically that nothing else exists other than material form. This obviously includes each of our separate and physically delineated bodies. However, once these fleshly figures expire, then all thoughts, memories, intelligence, and personality allegedly die with them. If this were the case, then the only things remaining would be nothing

[7] John Donne (1572–1631) is considered by many to be the foremost of the *metaphysical poets*. He also was a scholar and cleric in the Church of England.

more than the dust from our disintegrated corpses.

Despite such a strong and insistent pronouncement, others advocating the tenets of various spiritual philosophies have nevertheless adhered strongly to the notion of an eternal soul emanating from ultimate and indestructible consciousness. Normally, our souls are considered to originate from an all-encompassing presence referred to as God, the gods, divinity, universal mind, divine consciousness, divine love, or similar appellations. Many such beliefs have been upheld since time immemorial.

Despite the assertions maintained by many in the scientific community that refute any idea of a soul (or some other intangible source of awareness) remaining alive after the body is considered to be dead, certain researchers now have come to view death in a totally different light. As explicated in an Internet video produced by CBS News during October 2017, an international investigative team coordinated a study including over two thousand patients. This project has been a sizable collaboration between labs located at fifteen different medical centers in both the United States and Europe.

The entire effort was led by Dr. Sam Parnia at NYU's[8] Langone School of Medicine. His findings led him to a conclusion that could be considered diametric to the current opinions held in wide consensus by many of his contemporaries. Parnia's research team now has discovered strong evidence to substantiate claims of consciousness continuing well after clinical death has been established. This continuation of awareness occurs even though the physical body has stopped functioning and the brain actually has shut down completely.

He observed countless individuals after they already were declared dead. Subsequently he resuscitated them. Sometimes this was done even hours later. As soon as the patients were literally brought back to life, he was then able to ascertain the following data:

1. *Forty percent of patients had a perception of things going on around them despite that their physical bodies no longer were considered to be alive.*

2. *Two percent had complete awareness of everything transpiring in full detail.*

3. *Ten percent had deep mystical experiences, often sensed themselves traveling into a glowing, white light, and frequently were met by either deceased loved ones, saintly figures, or angelic beings.*

[8] New York University is a private research institution with its main campus located in Greenwich Village, New York City. Aside from its other campuses located throughout Manhattan and in the neighboring borough of Brooklyn, it also has a branch in Washington DC and numerous internationally based centers located around the globe.

4. *One hundred percent of those who could recall these profound encounters later reported that their lives were changed instantaneously, significantly, positively, and permanently.*

5. *The transformation in each and every individual included a conscious decision to be more loving and empathetic towards everyone else.*

6. *Currently, there is evidence that all of the patients successfully resuscitated have had these types of exceptional experiences regardless of whether or not they remembered them after their bodies were restored.*

7. *Parnia concluded that the drugs administered for resuscitation most likely blocked the memories of the patients unable to remember anything during their encounters with death.*

Until recently, much of the scientific community steadfastly adhered to the notion that the only reality of our existence is found exclusively in the constructs forming the material universe in which our physical bodies supposedly reside. Unfortunately, this widely dogmatized idea validated solely the identifiable constructs already having been discovered and quantified by science—and nothing more. Such beliefs certainly were applied to what we consider to be the entire true nature of our physical selves as well.

Therefore, when anyone was pronounced dead by a physician, every decaying corpse simply crumbled back into dirt and dust found upon the so-called *solid ground* of our planet. This signified—to all who endorsed and promoted a solely materialistic view concerning reality—that nothing of ourselves could remain in any possible way once the brain ceased to function and the body completely shut down forthwith.

The idea of an ongoing existence outside of the corporeal body had to be nothing other than the superstitious desires of primitive people who refused to accept death as a complete and utter obliteration of all living things. Nothing possibly could exist beyond the boundaries of each seemingly separate shell of mortality. This was emphatically true only when the physical body happened to be still breathing and allegedly *alive*.

However, Parnia's inquiries definitely challenge these tenets and bring us closer to understand the assertions made by spiritual principles human beings have practiced for millennia before modern science even existed. In the past several decades, there also have been numerous other researchers who have insisted on a reality that stretches far outside the

currently conventional doctrines signifying quantifiable materiality as being the entirety of veritable existence.

One such groundbreaking researcher is Amit Goswami PhD, a physicist and professor that I have referred to earlier in this work. Upon the first pages of his book *The Self-Aware Universe*, Dr. Goswami begins by sharing certain provocative insights through simple storytelling. While immediately introducing his thesis with an unconventional and humorous parabolic tale (one which happened to be an account of a personal dream of his), he confesses that this exceptional experience eventually compelled him to begin writing the book itself.

He quickly introduces us to a vital and profound concept. It is an idea that occupies the center of his discussion throughout said discourse and simply is none other than what his title heralds to all who would reflect upon it. Certainly, such a dramatic revelation only manifested in Goswami's dreams through years of devoted practice and study in two obviously essential areas for him. One of these surely had to be his personal commitment to a lifelong spiritual pursuit, and the other could be found only through decades of ongoing study, research, and teaching as a theoretical nuclear physicist and college professor.

The following introductory snippet from the first chapter of his book portrays a searching *dream-self* in dialogue with various other *imaginary* personae. After painstakingly seeking an answer to seemingly unanswerable questions, he blurts out to his fabricated acquaintances in frustration with the following chastising remarks. He scolds them for not accepting anything beyond what the well-practiced, preconceived notions of past generations already have taught them to believe and accept:

> "You are doing it all wrong! You can't be sure if all things are made of atoms—it's an assumption. Suppose all things, including atoms, are made of consciousness, instead?"

After concluding the story about his dream, he further emphasizes what he asserted earlier:

> The notion…that all things are made of atoms is an unproven assumption; it is not based on any direct evidence for all things. When the new physics confronts us with a situation that seems paradoxical from the perspective of material realism, we tend to overlook the possibility that the paradoxes may be arising because of the falsity of our unproven assumption. (We tend to forget that a long-held assumption does not thereby become a fact, and we often even resent being reminded.)

> ...If only matter is real, as materialism has taught us to believe, then material possessions are the only reasonable foundation for happiness and the good life.
>
> Of course, our religions, our spiritual teachers, and our artistic and literary traditions teach that such is not the case. On the contrary, they teach that materialism leads, at best, to a sickening surfeit and, at worst, to crime, disease, and other ills.
>
> Most Westerners hold both of these conflicting beliefs and live with ambivalence, partaking of a ravenously materialistic consumer culture yet secretly despising themselves for it. Those of us who still consider ourselves religious are not altogether able to ignore that, although our words and thoughts adhere to religion, all too often our deeds violate our intentions; we fail to embody with conviction even the most basic teachings of religions, such as kindness to our fellow humans. Others of us resolve our cognitive dissonance by embracing religious fundamentalism or equally fundamentalist scientism.

If we seriously consider the provocative discoveries of Dr. Parnia mentioned earlier, it is no longer logical simply to discount the accounts of thousands or possibly even millions of people throughout the centuries who have either witnessed (or personally undergone) the same types of paranormal experiences recounted by his revived patients. Equally, any inferences we might reach from Parnia's data might be incomplete if our assessment fails to acknowledge Goswami's conclusions as well.

With so much overwhelming information now available on the subject, it should be considered highly unscientific and illogical to declare that nothing exists once *death* has taken us from this world. Moreover, simply to cram all inexplicable, seemingly *metaphysical*, external, or internal happenings into a convenient, overgeneralized box by categorizing them merely as fantasies, wishful thinking, out-and-out hallucinations, or other seeming psychological aberrations (including mental illness) should now appear to be as unviable and unacceptable generalizations. By not taking into account the currently more-inexplicable alternatives, anyone doing so should be seen as being equally irresponsible as well.

Although terminologies describing, identifying, and diagnosing actual hallucinations are definitely essential, valid, and genuine tools in psychology and psychiatry, it is also essential for us to understand and accept that they have been misused, possibly abused, and even misunderstood. This certainly could become the case when the term *hallucinations* is used as a

broad and convenient label for explaining away phenomena that practitioners have little or no understanding of and personal experience with (or when their own, subjective personal beliefs become incompatible with those sorts of experiences described by patients or through discussions with others who likewise have had direct encounters inexplicable in terms of what is currently accepted as being quantifiable).

As we consider consciousness continuing after death, what about that same awareness existing before birth of this mortal body occurs? And if a part of us transcends our existence here on earth by being a part of what occurs prior to and after said transient life has expired, then the idea of our (soul-resembling) eternal awareness merits an acceptance of its evidentiality. Bearing in mind that this intangible *mindfulness*—which emanates from each of us while we are alive—also continues after our physical presence has terminated.

Understanding and acknowledging our own ongoing, potentially eternal consciousness within this context, Goswami's premise becomes more apparent and considerably more plausible. As we begin to recognize that said cognizance exists not only in the universes of materiality but extends beyond these quantifiable structures, then the idea of the subatomic world being only a part of something even more fundamental than itself becomes feasible.

Regarding out-of-body experiences happening after death, I too have undergone such transformations with an ongoing full awareness of not only my physical surroundings but of a vivid reality thriving simultaneously outside of what we normally accept to be *reality* detected by our five physical senses. There indeed were at least two times in my adolescence and young adulthood when such *death events* occurred in places other than a hospital. Those who witnessed these situations (including one doctor) reported that I stopped breathing completely in each case and no one could detect a pulse for countless minutes. Although no medical equipment was available to confirm clinical death, all individuals present seemed convinced that I had passed away, especially after multiple attempts to revive me had failed.

In both of these instances, there was a pivotal moment when I suddenly began looking down at my own physical body, watched people intently attempting to bring me back to life, even heard one individual cry out in frustration and despair, and remained acutely aware of all other details occurring in each of those situations. At some point soon thereafter, I found myself ascending through a wide corridor filled with the most vibrant white light imaginable.

Decades later, when reading about the accounts of others who have had similar experiences, I realized that in most cases (aside from my own), the experiencers regularly

described their seeming ascension through a tunnel of white light. However, in my particular instances, I always floated gracefully up through what seemed to be an inestimably wide hallway.

The main thing that I distinctly recall to this day is while I happened to be drifting upward through this vast passage, I also was being flooded with an overwhelming sensation of joy intertwined with a feeling of total peace and comfort—through a body that has transmuted into something other than solid matter. Perhaps the only way to describe fully the true nature of what I was feeling is to quote one of several, variant blessings often offered to Christian congregations at the conclusion of their weekly worship services:[9]

> May the peace which passeth all understanding remain within your hearts and minds through Christ our Lord…

Anyone who has traveled past death and returned can only describe the journey as being paradoxically indescribable. The joy is beyond all other joys. The peace truly does transcend all comprehension of what peace had meant to us previously.

Once I arose into the light, my etheric self was greeted by several luminous beings. These saintly *apparitions* radiated a wisdom and tenderness that inundated my senses completely. I was elated because the intense pain just felt by my physical self moments ago had totally evaporated. Instead, I suddenly was experiencing a euphoric, weightless condition that anyone might interpret as floating in midair.

Eventually, my angelic companions greeted me with indescribable warmth while explaining the reasons for my mortal struggles and sufferings. They all seemed to understand how I wanted to remain with them in that blissful domain. However, their faces suddenly took on a sympathetic demeanor.

One of them came up to me, kissed my forehead gently, and said that it still wasn't my time to come away with them. Together, they spoke enthusiastically of how I still had much to do in my corporeal form before I could proceed beyond. With these words, each of them blessed me in turn and I found myself being drawn back irresistibly into the physical world once more.

In an instant, insufferable pain regained its hold over my entire person, and although I

[9] The original version of this blessing can be found in Philippians 4:7, as part of the King James translation of the New Testament:

> And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

did feel brief moments of wanting to return heavenward straightaway, my *reborn* self instead looked squarely into the face of all my twinging, earthly adversities and afflictions, embraced them tenderly, and held them close to my heart. Surprisingly, they quickly and unexpectedly relinquished their vicelike grip upon each fiber of my mortal persona. Instead of feeling as if I had just died, I essentially felt freed of all aches and bruises. Suddenly, I was healed of certain emotional and physical tribulations that were afflicting me at the time.

Every situation where this sort of thing has happened to me, the scenario basically remained the same. Regardless of the seeming repetition, it didn't feel like a *rerun* on the second time around. Something new, fresh, and powerful had been added to the first episode when I supposedly died again.

IV.

"There are two ways to live your life:
one is as though nothing is a miracle,
and the other is as if everything is..."[10]

If we have ever considered actually how to awaken for the first time (or reawaken, if our innate senses tell us that we have already done this before) an elusive paradise that hitherto has been considered to be nothing other than wishful thinking or some mythical fantasy, an obvious question tends to arise within the yearnings of any expectant heart:

How do I actually get there?

Perhaps, a simple answer can readily appear while considering the pragmatic wisdom found in

[10] An adage attributed to Albert Einstein.

Michael Leunig's poem "How to Get There":[11]

> Go to the end of the path until you get to the gate.
> Go through the gate and head straight out towards the horizon.
> Keep going towards the horizon.
> Sit down and have a rest every now and again,
> But keep on going, just keep on with it.
> Keep on going as far as you can.
> That's how you get there.

When considering Leunig's gate through which we must pass, I think back to Victoria Safford's "Gates of Hope". But in relationship to the mind garden, hope is just one of many sets of gates. Honesty, kindness, integrity, humility, generosity are among some of the countless others. But naturally divine love is the most central and key to interconnecting all such thresholds.

As Leunig proceeds past his gate, he instructs us to set out towards the horizon and venture the wide expanse apparently separating us from that distant skyline; and he further charges us to go as far as we can. While focusing upon any horizon we may find ahead of us, our hearts instantly begin navigating borderless realms of the divine within. Because they are infinite, starry, wondrous domains to be found after passing through (any of) those countless, blessed gates. Of course, they are all comprised of every conceivable divine attribute as we now head off towards an ostensibly unreachable *vanishing point*.

Michael Leunig wisely and compassionately directs us to go only as far as we can, for this is how he insists that we truly will get *there*. As we continue the trekking, to rest and restore ourselves is equally an essential part of the journey. Without repose, it is easy to become exhausted, disillusioned with the quest, and even cause us to give up and retreat back out of the gates that led us into the *divine within* in the first place.

But with rest and repose, we can easily regenerate the needed energy and conviction to proceed further by rebalancing ourselves. As our pilgrimage continues, there suddenly comes a moment when we do not actually journey to an ultimate, heavenly destination, but it is in fact

---

[11] According to *Wikipedia*:

> Michael Leunig is an Australian cartoonist, poet, and cultural commentator.

He was born in East Melbourne in 1945.

the making of the journey itself that is none other than our veritable *destination*:

> Heaven is not a destination but merely a direction.

If we always keep this adage in mind, we can readily realize how heaven is the all-pervading miracle that is accessible to all of us at any given moment, as we otherwise trudge through these supposedly limited and limiting lives of ours. However, heaven isn't necessarily something for which we actually have to die first to experience readily.

Once our human intellect (and all other mechanisms of dualistic judgment) cease measuring out the illusory distances within the confines of space and time, we can instead transform ourselves in the twinkling of an eye—by making the *jump* into a seemingly unexplored, extraordinary condition. It is here where we will awaken paradise once again, as our own Eden is genuinely restored here and now.

During the fourteenth century, Saint Catherine of Siena[12] spoke of the quest to discover paradise like this:

> All the way to heaven is heaven.

She was also said to express this insight from a slightly different slant:

> The path to heaven lies through heaven.

Regardless, either of these statements will prove to be useful while many of us trudge across life hoping to be delivered into that elusive, eternal refuge. But most who think this way believe our deliverance will only occur after each individual first suffers through an ultimate death. So, is it actually true that all of us must wait and see if we are fortunate enough to be permitted into a divine kingdom after the fact?

Whenever anyone thinks in this fashion, seeds are being sown and all the distances throughout time and space inundate us with the erroneously dualistic belief that paradise is impenetrably separate from our current condition. And it will remain so until we relinquish this mortal coil and successfully pass the predetermined tests that such an exclusive residence will require of us to fulfill beforehand.

---

[12] According to *Wikipedia*, Saint Catherine of Siena (1347–1380) was:

> …a tertiary of the Dominican Order and a Scholastic philosopher and theologian who had great influence on the Catholic Church.

Then again, if we remind ourselves about the pronouncement of the kingdom of heaven being within us now (and at all moments), while we remain *alive* in the physical world, then the idea of first having to die physically before any of us can ever *ascend* to a more perfect place becomes less urgent, less credible, and—ironically—even less necessary. Rather than fixating our faith upon the idea of crossing the threshold of mortal death to enter heaven, shouldn't we instead be practicing paradise now (and as has been mentioned earlier) practicing divine love now, and practicing such an idea as though it were part of a never-ending miracle—during every breathing moment of our time here on earth?

Perhaps, this infrequently observed notion aligns essentially with Saint Catherine's understanding of how the path to heaven actually lies directly through heaven itself. This idea suggests that as we traverse our seemingly exclusive, corporeal lives now, a heavenly kingdom brimming with nonstop miracles is forever around us and inside of us as well. And once we find ourselves relinquishing each dichotomous practice to which we have adhered—perennially preventing us from seeing or believing in any miracles at all—we will instead discover how such an eternal Eden has always been accessible to every one of us. And this holds true whenever we consciously choose to live our lives fully in that all-encompassing embrace of divine love.

- Afterword -

A Final Consideration

I.

Online surprises...

In the Preface, I briefly pointed out that this entire volume initially had been called *The Mind Garden*. For well over a decade, there were no apparent reasons for referring to it by any other name. The current title wasn't adopted until 2014, and only after examining a multitude of Internet search results did I decide upon an alternative.

In 2000, just before embarking on the original version of Chapter 1, an appropriate dubbing for the whole work became obvious to me. By the latter half of the 1990s, my life-long mentioning of an inner garden had changed. I instead began referring to it as the mind garden.

Subsequently, to christen this literary enterprise with another handle seemed counterintuitive. I nonetheless drew up a list of additional possibilities, lest my final choice already was being used by someone else. Whatever I might select ultimately, it ought to be simple, straightforward, and hopefully unique.

Not yet being well-acquainted with the workings of the Worldwide Web, I was pleasantly surprised to find that a comprehensive search could be achieved quite easily, regarding the naming of this project. Certainly, any such investigation might not expose entirely what I had hoped to learn, but it nevertheless would reveal that which currently was in the public eye online. As well as checking for the title, I wanted to verify whether some of my central ideas for this book, including each component of the garden metaphor, were being used in a similar manner to my own.

I immediately made numerous inquiries on every major search engine and then repeated the process a couple of years later. My second online effort was expedited by the invaluable assistance of a visiting colleague from New Zealand. He came to the White Mountains in August of 2002.

Despite that both of these search attempts had been initiated approximately two years

apart, we cited no relevant results in either case. There wasn't a single mention of *The Mind Garden*. In fact, there were no findings for any chief topics or concepts employed within the text. Such a revelation definitely encouraged me to continue shaping this piece into a literary reality. My lifelong quest to develop a spiritual garden paradigm actually might manifest now on the written page.

However, several years later things did change radically. By the end of the summer of 2014, an insistent and intuitive prompting led me to reinvestigate online what had been examined earlier. I typed the same, familiar words into a search box once again. But this time my findings were diametric to those acquired previously. The appearance of the mind garden concept now seemed to be cropping up virtually everywhere. Somehow, this once-unique little phrase no longer was singular. It had proliferated exponentially into a vast new presence across the Worldwide Web.

On Google alone, nearly 100,000 listings were uncovered during this initial inquiry. Soon thereafter, I constituted an identical search on YouTube; and much to my amazement, it yielded more than 600,000 results at the time. Once several other queries had been made, I procured well over a million findings.[1]

After recovering from initial shock and disbelief, I continued looking into the matter. Many of my topics and metaphor components not only were being used but also had references going back directly to some form of the mind garden concept. On YouTube, there were numerous video talks and lectures called *The Mind Garden* or discussions using other appellations that were near to the mark.

Similar results cropped up on other search engines. Even a modest-sized book was for sale. I definitely didn't feel inclined to support such a work by purchasing a copy. After all, the adjoining advertisement inferred that the mind garden concept was of this particular author's own making.

However, I also came across a small booklet that happened to be available for reading online. It naturally bore the expected name but came with a subtitle attached to it. Although written in English, and allegedly copyrighted in 2008, this piece had been published inconspicuously on a non-English-language website in 2012.

[1] As is the case with all online searches, the results invariably yield enormous amounts of duplication; and some findings normally can have little or no bearing on whatever is being sought. In this particular case, whether I had discovered a million related web pages or merely five, the implications still would be the same. In the course of only a few years, zero findings no longer existed and the originality of decades of work now might be compromised.

Its creator's interpretation of the subject at hand definitely was dissimilar to my own and sounded like countless success-related materials I have read, only with a mind garden twist. However, many components of the apparent metaphor nonetheless were being discussed in plain sight. Even a brief, incongruous reference to my grandmother's religion had been cited therein.

During the time when I spoke to so many on the trail about this book, I also happened to be writing about my beloved grandmother's zealousness and how she influenced me to read the Bible over and over again. Oddly, this author singled out only her small Christian sect by name.

He also discussed most of the metaphor components that I had been reworking during the 2008 and 2009 period. Additionally, some other incidental items, discussed with specific people on the trail, interestingly found their way into this person's working of the mind garden material. I only can assume that he actually spoke with me at some point and decided to use my ideas for his own purposes. Otherwise, this would have to be one of the most peculiarly personal and *coincidental* findings that I had discovered on the net.

Behind some of these web-based mind garden schemes were individuals proclaiming to be spiritually enlightened teachers, psychological counselors, and success masters. In numerous cases, they implied or indicated outright that all ideas and concepts discussed were completely their own.

Even though my use of the mind garden as a title was hoped to be unique, I definitely knew that several simple though somewhat obscure *inner garden* metaphors had been in existence for millennia. Nevertheless, I did trust that my extended application of said analogies were founded within credible realms of originality; although an initial impetus for this work quite possibly arose from yet another source. As was mentioned in the Preface of this book, the chief influence for developing a mind garden metaphor came from the thoughts and ideas of William Blake and Joseph Chilton Pearce.

This having been said, for so many people on the Internet suddenly and almost simultaneously to claim sole ownership of terms and ideas that have been around long before these assertions had been made online, I initially found such pronouncements to be equally amusing, alarming, and bewildering. Yet, what else could I have expected while still riding upon our senseless seesaw of duality?

As I continued to evaluate said unexpected *turns of events* online, several useful dates

were also discovered. They were definite indicators of when applicable web pages had been created and when their written content allegedly had been copyrighted as well. Except for a single entry, most of the other listings were marked between 2008 and 2012, notwithstanding those with even more recent postings.[2]

Although there was one site that specified an earlier copyright, it still included the year *2008*. In fact, this webpage displayed the marking of 2003–2008. I assume that the author was indicating that the creation of different sections of the material in question took place during a five-year span.

I fortunately have existing files and copyrights predating all of those ownership claims that were unearthed on the Internet. For decades, there were also numerous friends and colleagues who have witnessed firsthand—and also attested in writing—how my ever-evolving mind-garden philosophy has been around much longer than anything mentioned online going by the same (or similar) name. Coincidentally or perhaps not, those web-published dates correspond precisely with the years that immediately followed the commencement of my rewriting this book.

II.

Rebooting the mind garden manuscript...

While living cabin-bound in the remote Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, it became exceedingly challenging to recreate from scratch what took seven years to produce originally. Besides, I had become somewhat pampered before these recent, dramatic changes dragged me suddenly into seclusion and impoverishment. Prior indulgences included the luxury of always having three computers on hand, but all such benefits no longer were available to me. Except

[2] Despite the few writings with alleged copyrights listed (as far back as 2008) I discovered no *mind garden* properties that actually were published online before 2012.

for one that remained inoperable at the time, those other two devices were destroyed in the flood of early 2007.

However, when first arriving at the cabin I had absolutely no impetus to write at all. I abruptly entered into an extreme situation. Everything in my life suddenly became totally inaccessible. No telephone line was possible there, and there wasn't even a signal for cellphones either. My car quickly had an empty gas tank because I suddenly found myself absolutely without money and with no prospects for making any.

There were even a few times when I completely ran out of food and water. Indeed, at one point things had become so dire that someone actually discovered my body just as I was slipping into unconsciousness.[3] Severe dehydration nearly had vanquished me. I had no water to drink virtually for three days and became too weak to do anything other than lying upon a bare mattress that had remained in the middle of the cabin floor.

Nevertheless, before reaching this critical juncture, there still were a few times when I had enough energy to ride an old bicycle into town, even though it was nearly ten miles away. The memories of my going into a local supermarket, simply to salivate over all of the sumptuous eatables I couldn't buy, are still vividly imprinted upon my mind. In fact, while wandering aimlessly up and down the various isles in the store, a familiar quote by William Wordsworth tormented me while it rattled through my head:

> And homeless near a thousand homes I stood, and near a thousand tables pined and wanted food.[4]

---

[3] This particular time (when I went unconscious from lack of food and water) is not to be confused with the sequence of events that I mentioned in Chapter 4—during my extended encounter with the hawk who, at the time, had shown me to her nest. That was simply another critical moment while staying at the cabin (coincidentally, at a time when I was similarly running out of food). But it happened a year or so after this first, crucial incident occurred. Oddly enough, I was more emotionally devastated preceding my hawkish friend's arrival than when this initial crises arose.

Even though I was close to death during this initial incident, the seriousness of the situation didn't distress me nearly as much as the latter one did. Perhaps I was not so utterly shaken the first time because during the several months prior to its happening, too many other devastating things had also transpired. Among them were when I lost a good portion of my belongings in the flood, when I was forced to leave my house and live homeless in the car for months, when my ankle was broken in the middle of the wilderness (just before snow began to fall), and when a series of traumatic situations were forced upon me during my stay at a homeless shelter soon after being discharged from the hospital.

So once I was situated at the cabin where I ran out of food and water, but before falling into unconsciousness, I frankly was too physically spent to process how thoroughly shattered my life had become. Quite frankly, I was too depleted to react emotionally about anything.

[4] This phrase is from the forty-first stanza of *Guilt and Sorrow; or, Incidents Upon Salisbury Plain*. An extensive poem comprised of seventy-four stanzas, Wordsworth revised and rewrote it several times. The first published edition was released in 1842. However, he wrote most of his original version called *Salisbury Plain* in 1795.

The poet lived from 1770–1850 and collaborated with Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1798. According to *Wikipedia*:

> ...[they] helped to launch the Romantic Age in English literature with their joint publication *Lyrical Ballads.*

Despite these hardships, I regained enough resolve to begin rewriting my manuscript only two months after landing there. Jotting things down on any available scrap of paper became the means by which the first sections of the final version of this book were composed. I continued *penning by hand* for several months until a friend loaned me an old laptop.

Unfortunately, there was no working battery for that machine. The computer had to be plugged into a wall receptacle in order to run, and the building's only existing electrical current came from a single, outmoded solar panel.

Although there were a couple of high efficiency bulbs placed in ceiling sockets, they still consumed too much *juice* to be practical for any prolonged use. This was especially true during winter months. It could take over a week to recharge a single storage battery when daylight hours were shortest and the sky was overcast.

That being said, consuming significantly more power than a light bulb, the computer neither was functional nor reliable to operate repeatedly in this environment. The only time that I could count on it heavily was during long, sunny stretches, mostly during the peak of summertime. Consequently, my most prolific periods for writing in the cabin occurred solely when days were longest and sunshine prevailed.

Because of these limitations, I often attempted to power the computer with a jerry-rigged and lengthy connection out to the battery in my car. This was how I actually managed to work at home continuously. Imperfect though it may have been, it also just happened to be the lone method for running that old laptop, at least until my seriously-mistreated car battery expired from excessive wear.

After replacing such an ill-used power supply (vowing not to commit such heinous acts of *battery abuse* ever again), necessity urged me to consider exploring nearby libraries. They would possibly have computers available for the general public to operate.

However, in my particularly rural circumstances, *nearby* simply meant going to the closest one, even when each venture meant a round-trip of nearly twenty miles. Needless to say, pilgrimages made to those blessed computers were restricted by my limited ability to procure enough gasoline; and I had to face this challenge almost every time I drove down the road for any reason.

Under normal circumstances, anyone would have considered this cabin to be an idyllic retreat. However, since it had been constructed recently, there still were many things about the place that hadn't been completed. Consequently, much work was needed to make it suitable

for an extended stay—not just as a place for the infrequent indoor *camping trip* or crashing out on an occasional weekend away from home.

The tiny bedroom was filled with cans of dried-up paint and evaporated varnish along with other sorts of toxic refuse. A small loft above the bedroom and kitchenette was filled with stacks of lumber and some unusable odds and ends. In the kitchen area there were no appliances at all due to the fact that the cabin had no plumbing and insufficient solar power for a refrigerator or cooking stove. Nevertheless, there was a nicely constructed set of cupboards with a countertop for preparing meals and washing dishes with water that had to be lugged from the nearest stream more than a quarter-mile away. Another lovely counter extended outward from the front wall and substituted for a dinette table.

In the main area, there was a single mattress positioned haphazardly near the woodstove. It had no actual bedding other than one flimsy blanket bunched into a small pile with a dust-ridden pillow lacking any pillowcase. A couple of plastic patio chairs and two additional bar stools had been retrieved from a local waste transfer station. On the upside, there was a brand-new cot for sleeping outside and an office-style swivel chair. Aside from these few items there were no other furnishings inside the place.

Even though the cabin was several years old already, it barely had been used. All of the windows still had their manufacturer's stickers securely plastered over a sizable portion of each grimy pane of glass, and it was quite a task to remove those well-fastened adhesive labels and the incredibly gummy residue that they left behind. Outside—just a few feet from the front steps—was an enormous pile of lumber scraps, discarded construction materials, dozens (if not hundreds) of soda and beer cans, and a wide assortment of other garbage as well. At one end of the clearing, a storage shed was filled to the brim and had to be cleaned out and totally rearranged in order to become functional. Tidying up the entire property took a few months to accomplish; but in the end it was well worth the effort.

After all, the physical premises were part of a very serene setting. The cabin's custom-made interior had exceptionally distinct and striking features. At first glance, it might have appeared to some as more of a rustically-elegant cottage than an actual cabin. Wildflowers abounded across most of the intimate meadow encircling the modest structure; and a gazebo near at hand became a welcome, outdoor retreat from mosquitos, black flies, and the intense, summer sun. After dark, it was also a wonderful place for gazing at stars and listening to the mysterious nocturnal noises emanating from those dense forestlands surrounding it.

In any other circumstance, this would have become a welcome retreat from the outside world. But I recently had become homeless and virtually penniless. Also, I was still recovering from a series of hardships and tragedies that began much earlier than the recent flood disaster having occurred more than a year before actually moving into the cabin.

Because I couldn't find an alternative place to live, this otherwise-enviable backwoods hideaway instead challenged me periodically with its immeasurable solitude. Even though I obviously was destitute, the logistics of my unique situation made me ineligible for any material support from social services for the first several years. Not until a series of unforeseen events unfolded was I granted even food assistance.

At times, when I was experiencing my most vulnerable moments, especially those happening all through the coldest and darkest months, the intense lack of light and the bitterly arctic-style weather often made all of these other factors almost unbearable. Although the structure had been relatively well-insulated, it still lacked storm windows and adequate weather stripping, so there were strong drafts and immense heat-loss from each of the dozen windows. During such periods when the harsh living conditions would get to me emotionally, I sometimes would regress into even a more negative state of mind. At such moments, I ironically (and often futilely) would refer to this otherwise-idyllic refuge as *my beautiful prison*—a phrase which even a few friends also began using when discussing the unforgiving isolation confronting me on a daily basis.

After all, such a structure was intended solely for very limited occupancy during the warmer months, so there were none of the usual amenities supplied in most other contemporarily-built weekend getaways. An outhouse was the closest thing to a lavatory, washing only could be accomplished by taking daily sponge baths, and my food was cooked on a tiny propane camping stove. Once I found a few new friends, my water no longer had to be dragged from the stream that was a half-mile there and back. Eventually, I could instead procure my water from someone's outside water faucet or a local roadside spring. In both instances, it took about a twenty-mile roundtrip to and from either destination.

But one of the most exasperating challenges regularly occurred while using the outhouse in midwinter, especially when the temperature dropped down between 0 and -40 degrees Fahrenheit. I found it necessary to use a putty knife for scraping ice off of the rim around the *potty pit* and then lay down folded paper towels to protect me from getting frostbitten while sitting there.

III.

To write and teach within the wilds...

During the first four years at the cabin, I occasionally wandered out on *writing expeditions* into the higher mountains during the warmer months. This I did as often as I could manage such outings.[5] Indeed, those wonderful treks into the higher mountains were preferable to staying at the cabin or going to the library. Not only did my writing tend to be more productive out-of-doors, but most of these scenic excursions gave me added motivation for exercising regularly in the open air. Consequently, I drove whenever possible to numerous local trailheads, each of them leading to at least one of my favorite wilderness haunts.

However, until a friend assisted me in purchasing a new computer with a working battery, all new material written *on safari* was kept in ratty little notebooks. Not until returning home each evening could the newly-produced material then be entered into that old laptop. In certain

[5] Although an abundance of wilderness surrounded the cabin, there still were no trails close at hand; and I never found bushwhacking through dense forestland favorable for writing. Other than by car, the only way to reach the nearest trailhead was by walking for several miles up an isolated dirt road. This remote track also happened to be the only connecting route for many large logging trucks. Despite the rugged condition and the narrowness of the road, truckers often pushed their rigs at inordinately unsafe speeds in order to stay on schedule. There were several times when I barely escaped being sideswiped or hit head-on. Whether I chose to drive or backpack on foot, irresponsible truckers made traveling the road perilous either way. Needless to say, I soon realized that it would be prudent to hike elsewhere.

The cabin fortunately was situated less than a mile from where the road widened and became paved, so I almost never had to drive in the opposite direction. My normal travels did not take me through the rougher, more hazardous, thirteen-mile, unpaved section of that precarious and lonely truck route. There nevertheless was one instance when I had a perilous encounter, simply by coming up the shorter end of the road.

Unexpectedly, an enormous semi jackknifed only a few hundred feet in front of me. It started sliding sideways down the hill; and as it accelerated towards me at an alarming rate, I knowingly acknowledged that death seemed imminent. In what appeared to be an eternally suspended second, my entire life passed before my eyes within a silent calm. Yet (in this same instant) familiar, invisible hands simultaneously magnetized my entire being. It happened to be on an icy winter's eve; but luckily, I had the presence of mind to slam on the breaks—something that normally is not predictable nor advisable to do on slick surfaces.

After shifting abruptly into reverse, I also was compelled to put the pedal to the metal, as it is said in the vernacular. If I had not reacted in such a manner, there would be no one to tell this story now. I immediately flew backwards (for more than a hundred yards and unthinkingly headed the car into a large snow bank. By that time, the truck nearly had caught up to my position on the roadway; and as I veered off into the snow, that out-of-control Behemoth came roaring past me.

Luckily, I was able to maneuver myself out of its path just in the nick of time. The truck missed hitting my car by less than a yard nonetheless. As that semi passed by my side window, the driver stared at me with an expression of raw terror, suddenly straightened out his truck, and continued down the hill without ever slowing. He apparently had no remaining wits about him to stop and see whether I were injured nor to check whether my car needed towing out of the bank.

Aside from the road being so hazardous to hike on during the day, none of the local trails truly had inspiring destinations that would be conducive for writing. Additionally, those paths tended to be exceptionally buggy throughout the summer season; and this was when I obviously would rather work outside. Therefore, it became necessary to drive to more desirable trails where preferable destinations could be found.

ways, I normally have preferred scripting with pen and paper; but when there were no choices other than to compose manually, the limitations of my then-current situation quickly reminded me of the untold advantages that a word processor's formatting, search, reference, and editing tools could supply.

After first arriving in the Northeast Kingdom, my favorite places for writing alfresco soon came to be by numerous waterfalls, mountain pools, and the like. Dozens of them could be reached from trailheads that were less than a forty-five-minute drive away from the cabin, especially in nearby New Hampshire. Their exceptional splendor always has attracted hikers from all over the world. It was in these secluded settings that I often met visitors from the Far East, both Eastern and Western Europe, South America, the Pacific Islands, Canada, various parts of Africa, and from more than thirty of our fifty United States.

Such extraordinarily beautiful landmarks generated an atmosphere that truly was inspirational for my work. On hot summer days, they also happened to be a refreshing substitute for an overheated cabin or the partially air-conditioned library where I otherwise would have stayed. The most ideal places for writing out-of-doors always remained by a few of those numerous, local waterfalls.

They inspired and enticed all five of my physical senses, as well as stimulating both heart and mind without pause. Along with their joyous and endlessly thunderous clamors, dynamic and breathtaking visual perspectives, splendidly fragrant olfactory blends of pine, hemlock, and moistened earth, and the cooling, vaporous, misty breezes cast from waters plummeting pool-bound, these pristine aquatic marvels also adjoined rock slabs that were smooth enough for sitting comfortably. Furthermore, some of them even provided naturally-occurring tables formed out of protruding, flat, granite surfaces upon which I could write in my little notebooks with ease.

Whenever I lingered at these scenic refuges, people regularly stopped and greeted me. Even in the remotest places, I often would converse with backpackers from practically all regions on earth. They hailed from Italy, Japan, South Africa, Russia, Argentina, Morocco, Alaska, Malaysia, Israel, Australia, Lebanon, Germany, Brazil, India, Hawaii, Iceland, and every corner of Great Britain—to name just a few.

Throughout the first three years of writing alongside countless cascades, rapids, and waterfalls (and even at the edge of a certain alpine lake or upon a few of my favorite mountaintops), literally hundreds of people asked to know about what I was writing; and

subsequently, they usually wanted to find out the name of the book as well. During almost every excursion into these wondrous locales, at least a couple of the more inquisitive among them would interrogate me thoroughly about the underlying workings of *The Mind Garden*.

Oftentimes, they wanted me to show them how certain philosophical techniques could be incorporated into their own lives. I occasionally chose briefly to share these ideas; but even less frequently, I would outline the chief components of the metaphor, describe many of its related processes, and sometimes demonstrate various practices of the conscious gardener.

Twice, I found myself giving several impromptu talks to numerous hiking groups successively in a single afternoon. On both occasions, I spoke to no less than thirty individuals throughout the day and obviously didn't produce much written material during that time. But once those stimulating, lengthy, and in-depth conversations were concluded, I would return home each evening and write furiously and continuously, far into the night. This I did despite the cabin's extremely insufficient lighting and the computer's ramshackle power connection to the car battery.

Moreover, because of my ferocious preoccupation with every new idea arising out of my informal *talks on the trail*, I inadvertently allowed the electrical power nearly to drain several times each night. As long as I could rush out quickly enough to restart the car successfully before the battery had died completely, it then became possible for me to continue writing thereafter. But without fail, I occasionally found myself biking into town the following morning to find one of several friendly acquaintances who might be willing to drive me back to the cabin and jump-start the car.

I once was told that the mind garden paradigm must have been altogether simple to conceive. This included the implied metaphor embodying my initial title for the book. Consequently, its apparent straightforwardness easily could have incited countless individuals to come up with the same ideas simultaneously.

However, that notion was expressed by two separate individuals who already had heard much of my philosophy being spelled-out step by step for years. Each of them had attended mind garden discussions and chapter readings I occasionally gave to friends, students, and hiking acquaintances. Therefore, a somewhat comprehensive and biased familiarity already existed before such an assessment had been made.

Nevertheless, simply hearing me announce the book's name for the first time is liable to conjure up images of an underlying yet comprehensive metaphor unto itself. The literary editor

R. J. Kaufmann[6] once said:

> We conjure up our own metaphors for our own needs.

But in this instance, the title is what tends to invoke the emergence of obvious metaphoric elements, because the original name for this book also happens to be the actual metaphor in a nutshell. Once such a simple, symbolic representation is ascertained by anyone, each of its parts quickly can become apparent while distinctive interpretations also arise out of every individual's perceptions and needs.

I spent weeks considering hundreds of titles, searching for the one that actually might achieve such a result most successfully. Taking this into account, it should be incontrovertibly evident that naming *The Mind Garden* simply didn't occur out of the blue, even though I eventually chose the one title about which I had been thinking all along. Here are just a handful of the dozens of other possibilities that I also considered using:

The Mind Gardener
The Garden of the Mind
The Gardener of the Mind
The Internal Garden
The Interior Garden
The Mind Garden Paradigm
The Conscious Garden
The Conscious Gardener
The Garden of Consciousness
The Mind Garden Restored
The Garden of Thought
The Primal Garden of Mind
The Mind Garden Reality
The Mind Garden Realizations
The Mind Garden Revelations
The Mind Garden Metaphor

Granted, employing other titles might have required me to adjust my writing approach while assembling each chapter in the book. My ultimate selection seemed to be the simplest

[6] Included in his work, Ralph James Kaufmann edited the following essay collections: *Elizabethan Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism* (1961) and *G. B. Shaw: a Collection of Critical Essays* (1965).

and most descriptive. Its perspective coincided with a few small sections of this work that already were underway, and also was something of which I had been speaking for several years. Clearly, the *mind garden* replaced my earlier use of the *inner garden* phrase to describe this entire philosophy, so it turned out to be the most practical and obvious name for the book in any event.

Regardless of how it might appear to the casual onlooker, the mind garden paradigm, including all of its underlying features, never had been conceived in a manner that could be deemed as *quick and easy*. Any semblance of effortlessness emerged only after decades of endless revisions and refinements to an ever-expanding conjectural structure. Nonetheless, once my name for the metaphor and even just a few of its major elements has been revealed to others, it would be a relatively simple task for them to merge these ideas with whatever personal, philosophical, psychological, or spiritual disciplines they were practicing and/or advocating.

Regarding all of these gardening titles, analogies, and principles, I had been continuously developing, challenging, and reassessing my own thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions about all of them for years. Through such conscious and unconscious activities did a mind garden metaphor manifest into something that everyone readily could grasp and adapt for their own use. I always wanted it to be an uncomplicated, effective, and enriching tool for anyone who chose to engage with it. This has been an ongoing objective of mine for decades.

Its seemingly simple nature could be compared with the facility and effortlessness that emerge when musicians master the art of performance. After years of serious study, their practiced outcomes often give the impression of extraordinary ease and spontaneity. These attributes seem as though they have always been present in the performer. However, such appearances certainly do not ensue at the onset of anyone's musical training; nor did a plain and simple allegorical model for tending our thoughts occur to me when I began thinking seriously about an *inner garden* metaphor in the 1960s.

IV.

A metaphor evolving...

For as long as I can remember, gardening, spiritual exploration, and music have always existed in both sides of my family. Group thoughts and individual ideas pertinent to these three endeavors have been seeded into my psyche ever since I was very young. Both of my parents were exceptional gardeners. They each grew up in rural areas and their sizable families tended large vegetable plots to help feed everyone, especially during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Even though my folks often grew fabulous produce at home, we frequently helped tend the enormous family garden at my maternal grandparents' farm just a few miles away. Aside from what my father had taught me, this collective gardening effort nearby was where I continued learning firsthand about tilling, fertilizing, staking, pruning, and the like.

From the ambivalent faith of my father, the agnostic tendencies of my mother, the fanatical religious obsessions of my mother's mother, and my paternal grandmother's more inclusive and mystical views about the divine did my own spiritual exploration arise. Even so, I eventually came to conclusions that differed greatly from theirs. But decades of diverse familial ideas and beliefs ultimately did burgeon upon various aspects of my own thoughts and helped to influence me nevertheless.

In the household of my maternal grandparents, almost everyone played at least one musical instrument. Singing and dancing were regular, weekend activities along with eating, drinking, laughing, and overall merrymaking. Music tended to be celebratory, embracing family and friends alike.

In contrast, my father's mother aspired to be a serious pianist when she was younger. It was something about which she never spoke to any of her grandchildren, and only after her passing did I learn of this well-kept secret. Apparently, my grandfather strongly discouraged her from pursuing this dream, so she gave it up completely and never urged her own children to study music either. Even though these creative aspirations of hers faded, she nevertheless did pass on a great love for music. So—aside from myself—several cousins eventually took up various instruments and studied long enough to play quite proficiently. Because of these influences and from several other important sources of inspiration offered to me outside our

family circle, the idea of perfecting music through daily practice became an integral part of my life.

It was only a matter of time for my constant exposure to these three separate pursuits to hybridize eventually into a single dynamic concept. They then became one of the chief objectives that continued to prevail throughout my entire life:

To practice spiritual gardening…

This definitely included the vital role that every dedicated *inner gardener* plays while tending a vast domain of divine potential. For decades, I personally engaged with such ideas and regularly taught others to do the same.

After it finally occurred to me that the *inner garden* phrase should be replaced with the *mind garden* notion, I immediately began introducing this more recent concept of mine (and its metaphor) to many eager listeners during the 1990s.[7] However, the mere volume of those with whom I spoke increased significantly after the spring of 2008. A substantial number of these interactions occurred while writing out-of-doors at so many of my favorite waterfall and mountaintop hideaways.

In 2014, after discovering that these well-shared concepts of mine had also been spreading like wildfire on the Web, I suddenly found that my mind garden ideas were being used by someone who definitely spoke with me in person. Obviously, I don't remember the vast majority of people I met during those countless hikes, but there were specific individuals who have remained in my thoughts to the present day.

One afternoon, as I remained for hours beside an exceptionally beautiful brook, a somewhat shy-appearing young man came up to me and unexpectedly began speaking in an outgoing manner. Although he continued smiling broadly throughout our conversation, his eyes betrayed an unseen sadness and a hidden air of discouragement and disappointment. The backdrop to this encounter was a series of cascades rushing down the mountainside.

After asking me the usual questions about what I was writing, he then spoke of a devastating event from which he was still recovering; and because of his apparent second lease on life, he also expressed a strong desire to change certain careless and destructive behaviors. He emphasized that an ongoing recklessness was what brought about such a disaster in the

[7] Although first discovering Blake's potent statement, "Man's mind is like a garden ready planted" as far back as the 1960s, I did not actively consider joining ***mind*** with ***garden*** to create the *mind garden* phrase for nearly thirty years thereafter.

first place.

Being touched by his story, I decided to give him more than just my regular *fifty-cent tour* of the book. Instead, I was compelled to discuss in detail how to actuate the mind garden techniques in his own life and reveal the straightforward principals that might aid him on his quest for change.

We began one of the most extensive conversations I have had with any of those who chanced upon me in the wild. To incite and encourage his recent desire for personal transformation, I disclosed several of my own spiritual experiences and how they profoundly altered my life's journey. He admitted that never before had he come across anyone who lived through such remarkable things, and then he expressed a strong desire to have similar mystical encounters of his own someday.

I suggested that these occurrences aren't where our focus should lie, but solely on learning how to live in love. It is then that those numinous events can appear as they should. They will only become beneficial aspects of our lives when occurring as the resultant offshoots of practiced compassion. If allowed to materialize in this manner, then they truly will blossom as integral, grace-filled parts of our existence.

However, if we seek them out for their own sake, then any seemingly transcendental experiences appearing within our midst will have manifested without being nourished by love; and in the absence of love, they only can endure as the product and proliferator of countless, dualistic weeds. Additionally, fixations that we might have on any extraordinary events can trick us into thinking erroneously. Simply by witnessing such phenomena, we can be deceived into believing that somehow we have been transformed into someone special, powerful, enlightened, saved, or even divine. But by affirming and accepting such illusory delineations, we further distance ourselves from all else in actuality. This includes our true nature found exclusively in the state of balance, oneness, and divine love.

Throughout the duration of this discourse, I also suggested certain affirmations, visualizations, and meditations that might aid him on his spiritual journey to heal himself. When our time together was finally coming to an end, his countenance seemed to have been genuinely transformed by our discussion. It radiated with a rekindled joy as he took my hand, shook it profusely, and repeatedly thanked me for my help. His final words have lingered in my mind for years:

> You've really inspired me, and I'll never forget what you said.

In 2014, while continuing my search on the Internet, I discovered a photo of this young man included in an advertisement that was announcing a lecture he was giving on the *mind garden*. Although he immediately looked familiar to me, I readily couldn't place where we had met. But after I also discovered him speaking on an unrelated online video (that is to say, unrelated to any mind garden topic), I immediately knew precisely who he was.

In this other talk, he fortuitously mentioned the singular occurrence that shattered his life many years earlier. When I heard him speak of this life-altering event, our meeting of years gone by (taking place alongside that splendid mountain cascade) instantly came to mind. However, if he hadn't personally disclosed to me the unique particulars of his terrible accident when we first came across each other in the woods, I doubt that I would have remembered our conversation solely by spotting his picture on the Internet.

Actually, I am pleased that he found useful all of the things we spoke about years earlier. However, laying even partial claim to a concept that wasn't for the claiming misses the point of our conversation entirely. Indeed, using an identical name for his talk is certainly legitimate, even without adding the subtitle he also employed. But because the title in itself also incorporates a built-in description of an entire paradigm, much more than merely a name had been taken willfully.

Any inspiration he might have experienced from our discussion certainly had the potential for being life-transforming; but without nurturing further those deeply-felt emotions with thoughts and actions reflecting divine love, any seed of revelation still will manifest solely as a single side of that relentlessly deceptive and dualistic seesaw.

Imbalanced, delusory acts of pilfering or *quasi-plagiarism* never exist within the unifying oneness of compassion. Certainly, if our roles had been reversed, I never could have imagined employing even part of a book's title that someone else was already using. This would most definitely hold true if that person happened to be someone that I professed as being such an inspirational influence in my life—just as this fellow had declared of me while we were parting. And despite any enthusiasm I might have gained from any new insights handed to me by someone else, I never would have dreamt of speaking of them as though I came up with all these ideas by myself.

Considering the many others online who also pronounced the mind garden metaphor to be of their own making, I cannot dismiss the possibility that a solitary and unlikely individual also may have happened to unearth the concept out of his or her own original musings.

However, the fact that each of these instances occurred within such a short period of time makes this likelihood all the more doubtful.

There may also be certain credibility in the notion that some may have heard about this metaphor through the grapevine, giving them an appealing, premade platform from which to explain various other ideas of their own. In this last instance, it still doesn't make the mind garden metaphor automatically their personal property, nor should they feel justified in claiming it *legally* for themselves.

Aside from the young man who I met on the trail, there were a few other faces that I also seemed to recognize. However, unlike the one fellow whose story resurfaced as verification of my otherwise vague recollections of his face, there still has been nothing to jog my memory about where I might have met the rest of them.

As I mentioned earlier, all of the basic mind garden ideas (introduced in this text) I have been sharing publicly for decades. Granted, thoughts are capable of yielding spiritual insights, improving our physical and mental wellbeing, manifesting happiness and love, leading us to financial success, and bringing about professional acclaim. They certainly have the potential to create all that we desire either consciously or unconsciously. Ultimately, any of these intangible seeds certainly can and do materialize as dreams of the heart fulfilled.

But when pure objectives are tainted with unbalanced and dualistic intentions (and their subsequent actions), we need to realize that any such opportunistic inputs regularly destroy each of our initial, idealistic hopes. They instead wind up producing a potent array of dichotomous possibilities, some of which may eventually materialize into deceptive and destructive alternatives.

Obtaining money, success, romance, power, and even spiritual salvation or enlightenment for their own sake only brings about more dualities infesting our world. These potentially duplicitous forms of achievement simply are multiple lids placed perilously on our own Pandora's box, and they are positioned to open directly upon us. The apostle Paul warned of such conditions when he quoted Jesus saying these simple words:

> ...whatsoever ye shall sow, so shall ye reap.[8]

Even here, this concise metaphor of a gardener's sowing and reaping is used to paint a powerful

[8] An earlier translation of the following New Testament quote, Galatians 6:7, "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow".

portrait that I would like to paraphrase below by re-penciling it into an identical yet more densely detailed landscape:

> All of our thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions must grow into equivalent consequences.

With this being said, I definitely admit that an intentional choice had been made to reveal my mind garden philosophy freely among those who were known to me and to even many who were total strangers. Does this make me a part of what caused such an enormous proliferation on the Internet? To be sure, I definitely played a decisive role.

There may have been some who might condemn me for acting naïvely, giving away certain key elements of this book before it could be completed and subsequently published. Perhaps such an allegation has the air of validity about it, but I would be still inclined not to concur. In this dichotomous world there are always opposing points of view, even concerning these specific events. However, rather than planting more dualistic seeds by replying with a defensive retort (even against my own, initial doubts), I trust that my response will ultimately manifest an outcome that is both balancing and grace-filled.

When I first discovered that some of my basic ideas for this book were seemingly being claimed by many, I certainly was devastated for a brief time. It initially felt as though I were grieving over the loss of a beloved child, one who I had ceaselessly nurtured for many years. Although, it soon seemed more akin to a kidnapping than a death.

But in the end, it became essential for me to accept that the mind garden concept now had grown into a sizable web-based entity beyond my charge or reach. This development was something I could continue to mourn and, by so doing, actuate more dualistic manifestations within my life. Or, I instead could use such an event as a springboard, the triggering point for a miraculous and transcendent *jump* into balance, oneness, and divine love.

Just before arriving at this conclusion, I found myself at the home of two friends and former students nearby. While I was musing aloud whether or not I should have revealed my philosophy to so many people in the first place, one of those dear individuals interjected tenderly yet emphatically:

> Of course you should've told them. What else could you do? That's who you are!

To be sure, this assertion greatly reassured me and I truly appreciated the encouragement; but

I still felt complicity in initiating a precipitate online onslaught of mind garden advocates. The following musings haunted me for many months after first making the discovery on the Web:

> *Have I nevertheless contradicted my own philosophical mandates? Shouldn't I have protected and sheltered my ideas as seedlings until they were published? Wouldn't it have been preferable to wait, allowing them to grow and ripen, so they ultimately could be used by others at what might appear to be a more effective time of harvest?*

Despite any consequences along the way, the only honest thing that any of us can manage in such an instance is to follow our heart.[9] For therein lies love; and only through divine love do we ever come veritably to resolve anything, even that which hasn't yet seemed to manifest fully in this delusory realm of time and space.

Of course, when we slide precariously from one end of the cosmic seesaw (a usual position in duality) to the divine fulcrum at its center, we always risk missing the fulcrum entirely. Instead, we often slip unwittingly to the other far end. But if all of our intentions truly are founded in compassion, then we most certainly will gravitate towards the seesaw's center. This is where infinite love always resides within—as the divine within.

Such is how I have come to feel about speaking with so many people about *The Mind Garden* while on the trail. It also should be clarified here that I began teaching this philosophy long before I ever dreamt of writing any book. After all, by the time I began sharing this paradigm regularly with acquaintances in the mountains, it was no longer an embryonic idea that I felt needed guarding. It already had evolved into a full-fledged prototype, benefitting both students and friends for decades. If I had to do it all over again, my actions would remain the same as before.

Once we open ourselves to giving freely and compassionately, there inherently lies risk. When I chose to reveal my work to so many recipients, I did it because of my sensing a deep need and receptivity from those with whom I spoke, discovering later that many such interactions made a significant difference in the lives of countless individuals. This alone made the gamble worthwhile.

---

[9] It is important to note that *following the heart* to find divine love comes about through practice, like everything else that we do. If there are already underlying practices of dichotomous thoughts and actions undermining our more noble intentions, then what appears as *following the heart* simply may be duality in disguise. In such a state, careful weeding of our thoughts, ideas, emotions, intentions, beliefs, and actions would need to be employed again and again before any veritable aspects of *following the heart* actually could immerge altogether and automatically.

If I hadn't willingly ushered those countless hundreds of people into the mind garden over the years, the fundamental message found within this *Afterword* never would have been told. If my Internet searches hadn't leapt from zero findings to over a million, then important personal insights of healing and reconciliation might never have been discovered. Yet, none of these incidents ever seemed completely unique. There most definitely has been an air of recognition and familiarity surrounding everything that I have experienced here.

Without each of the preceding *happenstances*, it would have been implausible to suspect that these *Epiphanies from the Mind Garden* indeed could have brought us full circle; and nothing has foretold this more precisely than those few borrowed words that I included at the beginning of this book. Upon commencing with my *Introduction*, the very first sentence quoted King Solomon of old saying it best:

There is nothing new under the sun.

- Acknowledgements -

Dedicated to All

At the outset of this dedication, with profound gratitude, I must acknowledge the great English poet William Blake whose mystical musings first inspired me to speak about an actual mind garden. To the American author Joseph Chilton Pearce, I will always be indebted for providing me with an invaluable little phrase. It has forever reminded me of a metaphor from out of antiquity that certainly influenced nearly every page found within this tome. And without the kind, generous, and dedicated support of many friends, family members, students, and colleagues, it wouldn't have been possible to bring these *Epiphanies from the Mind Garden* to completion.

I extend my deepest thanks to Ben Fitch for being a most generous and unwavering friend since high school. Throughout my isolated stay at the cabin in northern Vermont, he gave freely of his professional expertise as an editor. He also provided me with timely donations of new computers, contributed countless other necessities, and kept alive our lifelong friendship (and his ongoing editorial support) through biweekly phone visits from his home in the Pacific Northwest. Although, this only happened after the nearby cell tower actually transmitted a signal strong enough to reach the cabin through dense forestland, across numerous mountains, and over the neighboring hilltops.

To my former student and good friend of nearly forty-five years, I offer the utmost thanks to Jeff Cunningham for his considerable aid, substantive support, and ongoing assistance in many forms—including the use of his beautiful cabin in the mountains where I spent so much time writing and preparing this material. Likewise, an enormous amount of appreciation must go to yet another student and friend Dr. Robert Simon. My deepest gratitude abounds for his invaluable suggestions, insight, and many other generous contributions.

Grateful recognition indeed must also be given to countless other individuals who have assisted, encouraged, and inspired me throughout the years. This includes Donna and Dr. Roy Brewster—my *north-country* friends & students who have helped in so many ways; John Brooks (a dear and ageless New Zealander) who has given decades of moral support from the opposite side of the planet; Alexey Yarygin in St. Petersburg, Russia—for his enduring bigheartedness, a priceless donation of dozens of his original oil paintings and water colors, and for years of thoughtfulness, uplifting words, and boundless emotional sustenance; my sister, Alison Melahn and her family—for traveling many tiring hours to lend a hand with packing, moving, and other

exceptional contributions; my McFarland cousins, Bill, Jean, Joan, Sue, Jocelyn, and their families—for their encouragement and generosity; Robert Palmer, and Chief Allan Clark along with the Pemigewasset Valley Search and Rescue Team—for their selflessness, dedication, consideration, and fortitude, and without whose help I might not have survived to write and complete this newer version of the book.

Additionally, many thanks to Nick and Nawal Porcello—for their hospitality and helpfulness; Dr. Alan Koester—for his dedication, skill as orthopedic surgeon, and compassionate ear; Laraine Waters—for the heartening discourses, offering therapeutic excursions to the ocean while I recovered from a broken ankle, numerous material contributions, and countless other kindnesses; Ellie and Dan Snyder—for their exceptional and unexpected gift, Sharon Carr, Natalie Rooke, Marilyn LaCroix, Noel Bailey, Terri and Jack Ni, Bi Yun Wang and Zhen Fei Chen, Michael Phillips, Marlene and Dale Somerville, David Walters, Shoko Sakai, Shirley and Frank Bayerle, Cherie and John Estes, Lutie Saul, Ute Pfirrmann, Ronald Green, Alan Bramson, Scott Finlayson, Kay Wegner, Robert Tucker, and Alice Chandler. For those named here, and for many others too numerous to mention now, I dedicate this book to all of them with the deepest appreciation and my love.